OLIVIA SPENCER BOWER: THE FIGURATIVE WORKS

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OLIVIA
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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

Since the nineteen-forties figurative painting formed a major aspect of the work of Olivia Spencer Bower. Recently historians and feminist artists concerned with the relation between gender and art have drawn attention to how her identity as a woman has influenced her figurative painting in both the selection and treatment of themes. This thesis attempts to explore in detail the close connection between Spencer Bower's life experiences and her painting by concentrating on an examination of three principal series, the Rawene mother and child works, 'Getting About' and the Spinners.

Chapter One examines the first major extended figurative series, which was produced when Spencer Bower, relieved of domestic duties, lived for a period in the small town of Rawene in 1948. The series constitutes an examination of the theme of motherhood and research into the circumstances of their production has revealed the extent to which social and political considerations at the time circumscribed her interpretation of the theme.

The series discussed in Chapter Two studies elderly women and the process of growing old and has been shown to stem directly from her experiences of caring for her mother during the fifties. Her painting is related to work by other New Zealand women artists who have examined the theme by drawing on their observations and life experiences. Chapter Three examines the last and most extensive of the figurative series, the Spinners, produced during the sixties and seventies and related to her work of the previous decade. An analysis of the series reveals how it constitutes an extensive examination of the relationships between women and between women and the land.

Spencer Bower was unusual among women artists of her generation because she expressed an awareness of a relation between her gender and art. This is supported by the connection established between her life and painting.

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Unless otherwise stated the paintings illustrated are by Olivia Spencer Bower.

I

THE RAWENE SERIES: THE MOTHER AND CHILD THEME

In 1948 Olivia Spencer Bower produced a series of drawings and paintings on the mother and child theme based on her observations of women and new born infants in the Maori maternity ward at Rawene Hospital. These paintings are unusual in her work and in New Zealand art partly because of the circumstances of their production. They were produced after Spencer Bower was commissioned by Dr G.M. Smith (1883-1958), the Rawene Hospital medical superintendent, to illustrate his book *Later Notes from a Backblocks Hospital.*[1] This opportunity led to her realistic placing of the mother and child subject in the Rawene hospital environment and the depiction of contemporary Maori women and children in a European institutional context.

This chapter considers the circumstances of the production of the works as well as Spencer Bower's treatment of the mother and child theme in the Rawene series. Juliet Batten in an article published in *Spiral 5* (1982), "Emerging from Underground: The Women's Art Movement in New Zealand" suggested that in these works Olivia Spencer Bower may have "consciously or unconsciously" revealed herself as a female artist at a time prior to the feminist movement in the nineteen-seventies.[2] One reading of the article implies that Spencer Bower sought out these subjects to explore an aspect of female experience. Batten's article was written at a time when feminist artists and art historians were redefining women's artistic identity by identifying earlier women artists and attempting to define a female content and style. In this context, the work of Olivia Spencer Bower and Rita Angus was singled out by Batten after a survey of New Zealand women artists led her to conclude:

> It seems that the combination of provincialism and sexism has been deadly to our women artists. It has left them with two alternatives for survival: get out of the country, or stay here and become 'one of the boys' - as good as them, but definitely on their own terms. Aspects of the work of Olivia Spencer Bower provide some happy exceptions to this statement. While in her studies of the Russian Ballet company in 1937 she may have been following in the footsteps of Degas, her 1948 work on Maori mothers and their babies is more unusual. These paintings and drawings arise out of her close study of the intimate days following the birth - an unusual view of the subject. Also of great interest are her studies of her aged mother, and the series of works showing women spinning, done in the 60s and 70s. Olivia Spencer Bower is known mainly for her landscape work. Aptly, she wrote to Janet Paul in 1979, "*I feel that there is something that women can do that no-one else does and haven't had the chance to let come out.*"[3]

Olivia Spencer Bower's statement also invites a close examination of her works as it shows she believed women had the capacity to produce distinctly different art, but that existing conditions had circumscribed women's potential artistic expression:

> Women have always pretended to be men. I do think we get condescention [sic] from the men. They may not notice it but they are condescending with every bloody sentence they say.... The bit of recognition which this [retrospective] exhibition has given me has made me more understanding of other people's work. You see the rights and wrongs of your own work.... There is often a necessity for speed because the domestic scene is quick and the potatoes are boiling over. I feel that there is something that women can do that no one else does and haven't had the chance to let come out. [4]

Spencer Bower's observations come from a letter written to Janet Paul in 1979, a time when she was familiar with feminist issues through her contacts with the Women's Art Movement in Christchurch.[5] It was also, however, based on her own experiences as a woman painter. Her views on the difficulty of attempting to identify a female aesthetic, or in women's visual art production being used as a means of expressing the particular female experience are presented in her interview with Grace Adams. Spencer Bower recognised the role and power of institutions and education in defining ideas and values by her insistence that women critics are necessary to redress the male attitude she had encountered, and by her comment that "too many of

us have been trained by men." She qualified her approach as a woman to the Rawene mother and child subject by referring to a male artist's work: "You see Picasso did some wonderful mother and child studies." And in answer to the possibility of a specifically female insight she asked: "Have you come across it in any paintings? Have you been able to discover it at all?"[6]

An analysis of the Rawene mother and child works reveals in the treatment certain features which have been defined as being characteristic of work by women artists. However, because Spencer Bower works from a position within existing social and artistic structures it will be seen that they reflect common gender and racial stereotypes.

The 'Rawene' series is named after the small rural town where Spencer Bower lived from April until the end of 1948. Rawene is located on the Hokianga Harbour, a broad tidal river on the west coast of Northland. The Hokianga area is historically important as the site of early Maori and European settlement. It also occupies an important place in New Zealand social history because of its unique health services system, the 'Hokianga Co-operative Medical Service' established in 1941 by Dr G.M. Smith. In the late 1940s this special medical area was serviced by two salaried medical officers, Dr Smith and Dr Graeme Kemble Welch, and six district nurses, in liaison with the Hokianga Hospital Board and the Health, Social Welfare, Native and Education Departments. All health services, including specialist services and drugs, were available without charge. The predominantly Maori population, according to Smith, required more medical attention than the European because the Maori had poor living conditions by European standards.[7] At this period in New Zealand history the races lived apart, geographically and culturally.[8] This is an important factor in

considering Spencer Bower's artistic interpretation of the Hokianga Maori people.

Spencer Bower's background, race and social class distanced her from her Maori subjects. She was English born and educated. From 1920 until 1943, when she went to Auckland, Spencer Bower lived in Canterbury, a region which had a small Maori population. She had visited North Island regions where she encountered Maori people but prior to 1948 had not lived in a rural North Island area with a predominantly Maori population. This was her first close encounter with a non-European race and culture. Like many women artists Spencer Bower usually recorded her immediate environment. In this instance she was presented with subject matter normally outside the range of her own experience. As a result her extended stay in this remote Northland district was a productive period; producing mainly stylised works with contemporary Maori women and children as subjects, assuming prominent positions against the local landscape, as well as conventional portraiture and landscapes. Her later comments on her watercolour painting, The School Launch, 1948, reveals her romantic response to the local area and Maori people and her interest in the cultural links between past and present generations:

> I was excited by the spirit of the old fortified hills, the mixture of the old Maori culture with the new, the mangrove swamps, the remoteness of the place and the speedy accessibility to them by launch - I went to these places with Dr Smith and Dr Kemble Welch.[9]

The circumstances under which Spencer Bower worked at Rawene explain why she treated the Maori mother and child theme at this time and in the unusual setting of a hospital maternity ward. Spencer Bower was in Rawene recuperating from five years of ill health due to suspected rheumatic fever. She was in close contact with the Rawene medical officers, Dr Smith and Dr Kemble Welch from her arrival on 31 March, 1948.[10] In

a radio interview in 1979 Spencer Bower's immediate recollections of this period were of her interest in "drawing the Maori babies, the Maori women, and going up and down the river with Dr Smith and Dr Kemble-Welch visiting the patients, the Maoris, it was all rather wonderful." She spoke of being "enchanted" by the Maoris and the newborn babies who were "so gay, so alive."[11]

It seems that the Rawene mother and child series was initiated by Smith shortly after Spencer Bower's arrival in Rawene, when she visited the hospital. A diary extract reads: "His next book is at Caxtons now and he has taken me all round his hospital with a view to my doing a picture for the book."[12] She did not record Smith's reasons for commissioning her as his illustrator. However, there were mutual benefits. Spencer Bower was given the opportunity to observe and sketch Maori women and babies at close hand. Smith believed in the therapeutic quality of art; he also assisted other artists such as Eric Lee-Johnson in a practical way. Apart from the fact of her presence at Rawene, Smith perhaps saw the advantage of her social situation as a single woman artist of independent means without immediate family commitments and who, as a woman, had easy access to the female wards.

Few details are known of his initial requirements for the illustrations and the primary source of information on the circumstances of the production of the Maori mother and child series is Spencer Bower's 1948 diary. This supports the visual evidence of the works illustrated in *Later Notes from a Backblocks Hospital* that Smith initiated the production of the series through his requesting a work or works to complement his writings promoting the medical practices at Rawene as well as his "Organic Philosophy" and ideology. The two works on the Maori mother and child theme illustrated in the

book, Rawene, 1948 [Fig.16], and a pen and ink drawing, Security, 1948 [Fig.8], are related to other Rawene drawings and paintings.[13] An analysis of these works reveals ways in which Spencer Bower interprets Smith's beliefs and ideology.

Spencer Bower began working on the maternity series shortly after arriving in Rawene. It was her practice to produce sketches of her subjects in the Maori women's ward at Rawene Hospital, then to select from them to build up a studio composition. In Rawene, as in past years, her bedroom or a living room was used as a studio. It is evident from a study of the available Rawene works that pencil drawings and watercolour sketches formed the basis for subsequent carefully worked out compositions in oils,[14] [Fig.10] and they were sometimes also reworked in different mediums, as can be seen in the three versions of Security: the pen and ink drawing, a watercolour [Fig.11], and an oil sketch [Fig.9].[15] She had free access to the Maori and European female wards, segregated because Rawene Hospital "was run on apartheid principles...under [Matron] Bedggood."[16]

Spencer Bower did not work according to a set routine. She visited the ward almost daily for the first two months, working for a few hours often in the mornings when the babies were being fed. Her diary records show that she continued these sketching sessions at least until August, but on an irregular basis. A letter to her mother indicates the limitations imposed upon her from the hospital system which allowed maternity patients to discharge themselves, and it also reveals how she perceives these women primarily as artistic subjects:

> At my table is an expert of maori genealogy, a Mr Groper and he says this part is the cradle of the races. You see all types here. The women in maternity ward are very interesting but it of course takes plenty of tact and patience. And *speed* once that has been

> established as they rarely stay more than 4 days. They are very placid mothers.[17]

She was selective when choosing models, whom she refers to by name or physical appearance. For example, she wrote in her diary on 27 April: "Found a lovely patient this morning and started painting her and her friend the little round faced one. Her name is Mary Martin."[18] Spencer Bower also suggests in her diary that she observed the personalities of the women and the effect this had on the mood and atmosphere in the ward. This changed almost daily because the women only stayed a few days. She was concerned to create a good working relationship between herself and the Maori women who were her models. It is interesting to compare her attitude towards them with Frances Hodgkins' attitude towards the Maori community at Moeraki, fifty years earlier. Hodgkins' biographer, E.H. McCormick has quoted a "sympathetic passage" from her description of a tangi in a letter in 1899:

> The Maoris have come from all parts and I have renewed acquaintance with a lot of old models, they are mostly a rather degenerate lot I think, but still hugely interesting from an artistic point of view.[19]

Both attitudes reflect the climate of their times. They both write as outsiders observing a situation they are not part of.

In making studies on the mother and child theme in the maternity ward Spencer Bower produced a number of pencil drawings of newborn Maori infants. They are naturalistic portraits depicting either an infant's head or a sleeping infant wrapped in a cocoon of swaddling cloth. Their formal treatment shows the influence of A.J.C. Fisher, whose techniques of three dimensional tonal drawing had been studied with Fisher and Lois White at the Elam School of Art between 1943-47. One drawing, Maori Baby,[20] 1948, shows the head of a sleeping infant turned to one side, with its arms upraised and its hands clenched in a neo-natal position [Fig.13]. Besides being an

accurate representation of a newly born infant drawn from life, it resembles a work by Laura Knight, The Darky Baby, 1927. This is reproduced in her autobiography *Oil Paint and Grease Paint*, published in 1936.[21] Commencing work at Rawene, Spencer Bower may have recalled this work and Knight's description of the circumstances of its production. Knight describes working in the Black wards at John Hopkin's Hospital, Baltimore, U.S.A. Her attempt to draw in the "Darky" women's maternity ward was rebuffed by suspicious patients, so she drew in the babies' ward: "They were extraordinarily attractive little creatures, much more advanced for their age than white babies".[22] Spencer Bower has explained her choice of infant subject with similar reasoning: "I always wanted to draw Maori babies; they were so beautiful, the pakeha babies seemed too limp in comparison, their brown eyes seemed so alert."[23]

The Rawene drawings show a preponderance of rounded and ovoid forms; the cocooned image of the infant Korewha [24] assumes the appearance of a child at the moment of birth as the face partially emerges from the folds of swaddling cloth [Fig.14]. The significance of these drawings lies in the neonatal age of the infants; their newborn state and the universal significance attached to birth: the blissful state of innocence and oblivion to all but the most basic sensory stimuli, experienced only at birth and death. Spencer Bower has captured this in the works through her close observation of these sleeping infants. The drawing of Korewha may have particularly appealed to Spencer Bower as a similar image of a cocooned infant is found in most of the mother and child works, including three variations of a mother and child pair in different media. These possibly are among her earliest works on the mother and child theme at Rawene. They demonstrate how she interpreted the theme in different media. Spencer Bower describes working on two paintings

in the maternity ward during April, one of two women and babies, probably Rawene, and a single pair, as in the three versions of this work. A pen and ink drawing, from which the title Security is taken, is one of the nine drawings by Spencer Bower reproduced as illustrations in Smith's book [Fig.8].[25] It has been reworked from the watercolour version, which may be the work painted from life mentioned in the diary [Fig.11].[26] The third version is an unfinished oil painting [Fig.9].[27] The two paintings differ from the drawing by depicting the woman and infant in the maternity ward setting.

The treatment of the pen and ink drawing, Security might have been suggested by Smith, who has used it in *Later Notes from a Backblocks Hospital* to support his opposition to the controversial "fee for service" Social Security Medical Benefit system, recently introduced by the Labour government after prolonged negotiations with the British Medical Association.[28] The illustration is accompanied by the inscription:

> Will Social Security destroy Instinctive Security?
> Shall the mothers pass the buck? [29]

Drawing on Smith's beliefs, this can be interpreted as follows: "instinctive" childcare, that which follows commonsense biological instincts, leads to a feeling of well-being and security for both child and mother. This is threatened by the introduction of a medical benefit which encourages dependence on the dictates of B.M.A. members and the state. Smith opposed offical Plunket Society policies which imposed a strict regime of rules on pregnant and child-rearing women. Here, punning on the word "buck", he places the onus of responsibility onto the mothers who must make the choice between his ideas and the dominant ideology.

Spencer Bower's interpretation of Security takes the form of a half-length portrait of a Maori woman cradling a sleeping infant in her arms. The pen and ink illustration takes the circular shape of a tondo, a form favoured in treatments of the Madonna and Child during the Renaissance, particularly by Botticelli, Raphael and Michelangelo. The artist may have intended this association as an evocation of the Ideal mother prototype in response to Smith's attitude. Smith, at least, would know that it was also the form chosen by Sir Truby King and the Plunket Society for their symbol, which depicts a neatly-groomed European woman tenderly breastfeeding a warmly-clad child, their hands both touching her breast. It declaims King's ideology in a clear and refined manner, the small-scale figures set against a solid black ground.[30] Perhaps Security was intended to pun on this symbol, just as another illustration of a two-headed snake was deliberately intended by Smith to satirise the B.M.A. symbol.[31]

The words "SECURITY" are inscribed around the base. The circular shape is accentuated by spikey lines which surround the compact image, symbolising the sun as giver of light and life. The circle is interrupted at the point where it should touch the crown of the woman's head. A halo effect is created by the empty space, which denotes the place where light falls onto the woman's head. By utilising the medium, the artist also presents the woman and child as symbols of light opposed to darkness, for they are silhouetted against an enveloping black background. The circular form traditionally connotes perfection, completeness and the cosmic power of nature. Imagery, within circular forms, predominates in the drawings illustrating Smith's book.

The watercolour version treats the theme of modern motherhood in a

direct, uncomplicated manner [Fig.11]. It has a simplicity, freshness and clarity characteristic of Spencer Bower's watercolour style of the time. The content places the mother and child subjects in the contemporary setting of the Rawene Hospital maternity ward. A young Maori woman leans against a pillow cradling a sleeping infant in her arms. She is clad in a plain red nightdress while the infant's body is enveloped in bulky white swaddling. As in the drawing Korewha only the face is visible. Behind them and to the right of the bed are a continuous row of windows, indicating the source of the bright light which is evenly distributed over the picture. The outside world does not intrude on this intimate scene however. Instead of opening on to an exterior view, the window panes are translucent shimmering blue and white squares and rectangles. The sky-blue reflects off the deep blue triangle filling the empty space under the windows. The source of the natural lighting is indicated by the soft highlights on the woman's face and shoulder of her gown and in the blue sheen of her black hair. Yet it mainly falls on the tiny infant's pure white shawl, which thus stands out against the creamy tones of the bulky bedding. The intimacy of the scene is heightened by an overhead viewpoint, although the figures are not pressed close to the picture plane as in the pen and ink drawing and the oil painting.

The bright palette is not in character with Spencer Bower's watercolour range at that time, being more consistent with her style of the late thirties, but the colour selection and arrangement effectively sets up the viewer's emotional response to the imagery. Spencer Bower juxtaposes two opposing warm-cold primary colours, red and blue, as a foil to the white masses. The flat planes of bright colour give solidity and weight to the composition. Line and colour play a significant part in defining the theme, as the woman's maternal role is emphasised by juxtaposing the heavier mass

of colour and the solid rounded contours of the woman's form against the lightness of the infant's. Attention is focused on the young mother, whose introspective attitude adds weight to the idea that she is contemplating her new situation and identity, in a role socially defined as a woman's vocation.

Because she had previously treated the mother and child subject only occasionally, when the opportunity arose through access to friends with children,[32] Spencer Bower drew from the works of other women artists as models in this new situation. Her contemporaries at this time were studying and adapting ideas from Post-impressionism and Cubism. Spencer Bower's modernist handling relates the work to Impressionism and Post-impressionism. She may have seen reproductions of works by Mary Cassatt, whose treatment of the mother and child theme can be related to this work. In its formal treatment it broadly resembles Cassatt's prints and paintings of the period around 1890, which adapt stylistic elements from Japanese prints, Degas and Manet. For instance, it recalls a well known Cassatt oil, The Boating Party, 1893-94,[33] in its cut-off, assymetrical composition, flat blocks of high-keyed colour and the slightly modulated linear contours of the forms. Spencer Bower's watercolour can also be compared to another work from this period, The Bath,[34] in which Cassatt has adapted Degas' technique of an intimate key-hole view by tilting the diagonally opposed monumental figures of the mother and child towards the viewer. While both artists treat the theme of modern motherhood in a manner which downplays the sentimentality associated with the subject, Cassatt mainly depicts the mother with an older baby or child in an intimate, domestic setting, engaged in some everyday activity, basing her interpretations on her observations of her family circle.

While the context differentiates them, in their mother and child works Cassatt and Spencer Bower adopt similar pictorial devices to reinforce their thematic approaches, and they both place emphasis on the mental states of their women subjects.[35] In a later work by Cassatt, Sleepy Nicolle,[36] the formal emphasis placed on the mother clearly projects her psychological introspection. Griselda Pollock has pointed out the significance of this emphasis in Cassatt's work; an observation that also is apt in this context: Cassatt explores the "nature of the state of motherhood....Too often the enormous changes wrought in a woman's life by childbirth and becoming a mother are overlooked." [37]

Spencer Bower's oil painting creates an immediate sense of intimacy formed by the close presence of the woman, whose figure is pressed close to the picture plane [Fig.9]. Because of the closeness the focal point of this composition is the concave ellipse formed by the woman's arms and interlocking hands which enclose the infant's body. However this serves to deflect attention back to the contemplative woman because the infant's face is blank. The artist may be suggesting that, unlike the woman, the newborn infant has yet to gain its individuality and personality. Yet typifying elements in the imagery enhance traditional ideas of maternity, including the woman's inclined head and downcast eyes, the protective encircling arms and the closeness of the infant to the mother's breasts denoting their physical bond as well as the mother's nurturant role. In contrast to the watercolour, pastel colours of blue, pink and cream predominate in this work.

The decorative handling of paint contributes to the change in approach because of the enlivening effect of the short, broken brushstrokes, which play over the

forms of the woman and child, splaying out from the centre line of the child's swaddling. Spencer Bower adopted this brushwork technique for her oil paintings when she was at Elam, but the changes seen in the Rawene works suggest she abandoned it in favour of overall textural consistency. She later said that at Rawene she was using oils for the first time with some confidence.[38] The unfinished state of this work suggests it was early experiment as she sought an appropriate technique to express her ideas. Spencer Bower worked through a basic theme in three different media.

The theme was also developed in multiple figure compositions which utilised the studies taken in the hospital environment. The watercolour painting Rawene Mothers,[39] 1948, is an unusual departure from her realistic figure studies of former years [Fig.12]. The image of maternity from the former works is incorporated into a composite painting of three Maori women arrayed against an atmospheric background. The sweeping dark tonal washes suggest a feeling of indefinite space. The imagery suggests the three contemplative women are considering theirs and their children's futures. The profiled head of a woman, perhaps a kuia, faces away into the distance. This romantically conceived image of the Hokianga Maori women and children relates to the ideas expressed by Spencer Bower in explanation of The School Launch.

The oil painting Rawene,[40] 1948, introduces an unusual variation to the mother and child theme by its contemporary portrayal of Maori mothers with their newborn infants in the Rawene maternity ward [Fig.17]. It is a genre painting, carefully devised to focus attention on the maternal relationship. It treats the maternity theme in a traditional way, upholding the popular idea that motherhood is a happy vocation. A photograph shows the

completed work as it appeared in 1949, when it was reproduced in Smith's book [Fig.16]. It depicts two women lying in their hospital beds, each holding a swaddled infant. A third woman, also Maori, appears in the left foreground. Only her head and shoulders are visible but she leans forward, eyes downcast, engaged in some self absorbing activity. She may also be a maternity patient, looking down at an unseen child. Not only is this suggested in her expression and the downward inclination of her head but in the way the artist has linked her head to the woman and child above.[41]

The other two women are absorbed in their own infants. They look intently at them, as if unaware of the other's presence. The new-born infants are too young to respond to any attempt at interaction. The physical bond is communicated by the emphasis placed on the mothers' hands, which are not only the point of physical contact but the source of psychological security for the one to four day old infants.[42] They take on the appearance of dolls, swaddled securely in wraps, perhaps because the maternity role seemed somewhat unreal to Spencer Bower. The young mother in the centre of the picture lies back in her bed playfully holding up the child as she studies its face. In the background the second mother holds her infant close to her breast, cradling it with encircled arms and firmly clasped hands. She leans back contentedly against the pillows supporting her back. This mother and child format constitutes the central motif of this series. The number of times Spencer Bower returned to it demonstrates its importance to her.

The pose of the principal mother and child group in the centre is a variation of this format. The variation is significant because it presents another popular maternal image, the mother who is happily absorbed in some playful activity with her child. This carefree mother provides a contrast to the

recurrent images of the passive and introspective mother in other works in this series. Concomitantly, it complements this dominant motif because it shows another aspect of the maternal relationship presented in Security.

Rawene is an elaboration of the imagery and theme of the 'Security' works. This is evident from the original title, "Instinctive Hands", chosen by Spencer Bower when she sent the work to the publishers, Reeds, in Wellington in April 1949.[43] This was changed to Rawene, presumably by Smith, as the work is reproduced under this title in *Later Notes from a Backblocks Hospital.*

Rawene was first painted between April and September 1948, when it was photographed [Fig.15]. It was then repainted. A comparison of the final painting with the photograph of the painting in its first state shows how Spencer Bower clarified the imagery to convey Smith's ideas. The first impression received is the change of mood and atmosphere. While the original version is not sombre, it is contemplative in contrast to the celebratory mood of the final work [Figs.16 & 17]. The air of mystery in the first painting is enhanced by the diffused lighting whose source is two curtained windows. The lighting falls softly over the forms, blurring the features of the two women and the infant nearest the windows. The secretive atmosphere is created by the cumulative effect of the half-light, the sun dappled window spaces and the closed interior space. In that period of western society the practices and processes of childbirth were cloaked in mystery, known only to doctors, nursing staff and, to a lesser extent, the mothers.[44] Spencer Bower's open access to the maternity ward gave her a privileged insight into the first days of life, if not the actual birth process. This work appears to register her impressions.[45]

In the reworked version the interpretation has been shifted from a private vision to a public one. There is a relaxed and happy atmosphere in the ward. The cloistered mysterious atmosphere is replaced with an air of homely familiarity and relaxed informality in keeping with Smith's presentation of the hospital. Curtains billow at two open windows which open onto a vista of the Hokianga River and the distant range of hills. A centrally positioned luminous blue mountain peak is silhouetted by a streak of white paint, suggesting atmospheric perspective. However this also serves to locate the scene in this region. A reporter's impression in 1928 of the new hospital, Rawene's "crowning glory" as well as "the embodiment of Dr Smith's personality", supports Spencer Bower's pictorial description:

> It is what few hospitals are, a cheerful place. The interior is painted in bright, even gay colours. There is surgical cleanliness but little of the oppressive deadly hospital whiteness. The floors are covered with indiarubber with a bright marble pattern. The whole building is flooded with light and air.[46]

Spencer Bower told Eric Lee-Johnson in 1950 that "the colour was the best part of this work."[47] The colour harmonies of the extant painting serve a descriptive and symbolic purpose. The predominant light tonalities effectively convey an atmosphere of brightness. The open windows fill the room with light and air. The bright light is reflected off luminous white draperies, bedlinen and clothing. Broad brushstrokes of white paint are loosely applied over the pink wall surface. The marbled floor is a rich earthy russet/blue/black, harmonising with the natural brown skin colour and jet black hair of the subjects and the red accents in the exterior landscape.

The connection between nature and nurture is accentuated because the centrally placed woman wears a pink and white gown, colours that were

popularly associated with maternity and femininity in the 1940s and fifties. Even baby blue colours are used. In that era at least, New Zealand babies were dressed in pink or blue garments to denote their gender. The principal colours are distributed throughout the picture, linking the interior scene with the landscape. The mountain peak is illuminated and appears to glow like a beacon. Colour is used to enhance the message of joy and celebration. At the same time, it is used to convey a psychological message to the audience.

The brushwork is gestural and expressive. Only the smooth, even modelling of the heads of the principal mother and child contrasts with the broad directional brushstrokes applied over most of the surface. The composition is based on a diagonal construction formed principally by the outlines of the two beds intersecting with the lines denoting the window sills and wall and those created by the juxtaposition of the figures. To balance this, vertical lines are formed by the outlines of the windows, curtains and bedframes as well as the repetition of pyramidal shapes throughout the composition. The uplifting lines help underline the theme of joyful celebration.

Spencer Bower used the figures to create a circular movement opposing the dominant diagonal lines moving from right to left. In the first version this opposing force tends to move in a series of angular zigzag lines, beginning at the lower left corner. The series of counterpoint movements from woman to woman, then child to child and woman leads out of the picture at the top where the curtained window meets the frame.

In the reworked design Spencer Bower replaced the linking angular forms with curvilinear ones. A sinuous line flows in a unified circular movement through

the drapery and bodies of the mothers and children before returning inside the room to the principal group. A further unifying connection is the inversion of the rounded mountain peak in the curve of the woman's outer arm and more significantly, in the point where the forms of mother and child join. The outer line of the circle now draws attention to the arms and hands of the two mothers where they connect with their infant's bodies, denoting security. The unity of mother and child is reinforced through smaller circles and ovals repeated within and around the individual groupings. Further, the shapes of the women's bodies under the sheets, formerly a flattened solid mass now appear as a wave of diaphanous S curves. The drapery enveloping the central infant has been given the reverse treatment so that its upright cylindrical form is stiff and awkward. Spencer Bower reworked the composition in the second version to give a clearer expression of the maternity theme.

The placement of the mother and child groups beside the pair of windows opening out to a landscape vista is adapted from a convention found in Renaissance treatments of the Madonna and Child. Spencer Bower had previously utilised this format in a formal portrait of a European Mother and Child in 1945, probably an Auckland friend Dr Edna Birkinshaw and her son. She indicated the geographical location of their home in the Auckland suburb of Remuera by depicting a vista of the shoreline.[48] In Rawene the connection between the subjects and the local landscape is reinforced by the compositional changes described. The replacement of the veiled curtains with a view of the region's geographical features alters the original meaning because it identifies Rawene Hospital as the location and source of Spencer Bower's maternal imagery. The theme was thus shifted from a general to a specific context to associate the women and infants with Smith's hospital and medical practices. On another level, by the inclusion of the illuminated

mountain and the circular compositional arrangement Spencer Bower may have intended to suggest a symbolic connection between the local Maori women and children and the land, perhaps signifying their source of tribal and spiritual identity.[49]

The image of the subjects has also been changed between the first work [Fig.15] and the second version [Fig.16]. The facial features have been altered. This change cannot be justified simply as a unifying factor in the design because of the race of the subjects. Their characteristic Polynesian features have been downplayed. This is most evident in the woman in the left foreground. In the original work she is depicted naturalistically, representative of a full-blooded Maori, while the faces of the other women are masks. The Polynesian features of the nearest are suggested rather than defined while the other's face is a blank oval.

By these alterations the woman in the foreground loses her significance as the dominant female subject. Her size has been reduced. By shifting her form closer down into the corner the former impact of her presence is reduced. Her formerly square shoulders are rounded and the downward inclination of her head has been increased. All the facial features have been softened. She is no longer a specific racial type of striking appearance, a representative image of a dignified and self-assured Maori woman. Rather, her submissive femininity is emphasised. The former image may have appeared to contradict the Maori stereotype Smith presents in his books.

Considering this change, it is puzzling that Spencer Bower later objected to the further alteration of this woman's features by the publishers of *Later Notes*. She complained to Reeds that the woman in the reproduction was no longer

identifiable as a Maori, as she intended her to be, so the painting therefore lost its significance as an illustration to Smith's book.[50] The artist's annoyance at the publisher's interference with her work may explain why she painted this figure out at a later stage. She perhaps recognised that her own original vision was being altered out of all recognition.

The formerly broadly handled face and bullish neck of the second woman has also been refined. The conventional detailing means it is now an easily assimilated image, representative of the stereotyped young, pretty, carefree and Polynesian mother, an exotic subject that was at the height of its popularity in the late nineteenth-century; exploited particularly by the European painter Gottfried Lindauer, whose painting Ana Rupene and her Child, c. 1880, remains the best known example of this genre in New Zealand.[51]

The overall changes made by Spencer Bower between the first painting and the reworked image can be attributed to the artist's need to present an image compatible with Smith's beliefs and writings. The work now promotes the idea that the midwifery practices at his hospital were pleasant and safe, and that the ideal maternity patient was relaxed and carefree. The final work may be intended to convey Smith's deeply held conviction that the Maori is childlike and incapable of abstract thought. In his book Rawene is placed opposite a page in which he expresses this belief by stating that "the Maori adult is still in the nursery" with the "small Pakeha boy."[52] It is probable that the changes made by Spencer Bower in depicting the Maori women were influenced by Smith's beliefs. She shifted attention away from the thoughtful woman in the foreground of the original work to the young and carefree mother who plays with her doll-like child in a nursery setting.

Silver and Gold,[53] 1948, is thematically related to Rawene, presenting an image of Maori motherhood derived from conventional racial and gender stereotypes [Fig.18]. The elaboration of an exotic Madonna and Child format can be seen in Silver and Gold, which is differentiated from the other Rawene maternity paintings by its more abstract treatment, adapted from Post-impressionism.

Silver and Gold was perhaps Spencer Bower's boldest stylistic experiment using Post-impressionist techniques and ideas at that date. As with the other mother and child works it has not been possible to give this work a precise dating, and therefore accurately place it within the series. It remained in the artist's collection until her death, and it was reworked at least twice. Comparisons of a black and white photograph of the work in its original state, a later colour photograph from the 1970s, and the extant work [Fig.19] show that Spencer Bower concentrated her alterations on the figure of the woman in the foreground. The figure has been reduced in size and the face is now completely obscured, so that it bears little relation to the original in which the features and form are delineated. These reworkings suggest that Spencer Bower changed her perception of this mother and child image.

Spencer Bower was an individualistic and eclectic artist, and Silver and Gold cannot be specifically related to a particular artist or work. The initial impact of the composition derives from the ochre colour boldly accentuating the empty space in the centre. This is juxtaposed for maximum effect against the blue draperies and black hair of the idealised mother figure dominating the foreground. Spencer Bower's adaptations from Post-impressionism also leads to the disposition of a shallow picture plane and the bold elimination of

detail. A high viewpoint is taken which halts recession.

Stylistic devices often found in Post-impressionism, her use of a diagonal emphasis, marked adjustment in scale between the figures to create the illusion of spatial recession and high viewpoint are found as well in Japanese prints. Spencer Bower's knowledge of oriental art may have contributed to her use of these techniques.

The high viewpoint effectively creates an artificial barrier distancing the viewer from the unreal world occupied by the three mother and child groups, perhaps paralleling Spencer Bower's own alienation from the subjects. Her arrangement of these composite groups at the top left and right and lower right corners of the flat picture plane gives the illusion that they float in space. This emphasises the unreal, symbolic nature of the work. The tonal contrasts contribute to this floating effect because the three figure units and the beds supporting them are painted in pale, light colours of pink, blue and white. They are projected against a heavier ground of opaque yellow ochre painted in thin layers over a red base. The thin legs of the hospital beds dissolve into this rich golden mass. The cutting-off of the beds contributes to the impression that they float in infinite space.

Spencer Bower based this work on her observations in the Rawene maternity ward. The disposition of the figures differs from Rawene in the substitution of the woman at lower left with a young woman cradling an infant at centre right. The poses of the three women are variations also of the format seen in the other Rawene maternity works. The dominating rounded forms of the women and children, the rounded outlines softened under drapery and bedclothes, are juxtaposed with with the angular shapes of inanimate objects. The

viewpoint has also been shifted from theside of the beds to a higher position facing them. When viewed from this position the beds and their occupants are presented as separate units. The oblique positioning and acute angle of vision sets them apart; they are not symbolically linked through juxtapositions of form and object as in Rawene.

It is suggested that this physical isolation of the three mother and child groups has been contrived to project the physical situation and psychological state each woman. It develops the idea already expressed in Rawene and in the pen and ink drawing Security, that the individual mother and child are independent beings, locked together in their own secure world symbolised by the circle created by their interlocking forms. The women do not communicate with each other. Without exception they focus on their own newborn infant. The gaze is tender and loving. Their intense concentration suggests each sees their child as the source of their security and identity.

This can be readily communicated to the viewer by the woman in the foreground because her eyes are open and because of her close proximity to the picture plane. Her back is turned away from the other two mother figures so that her physical and mental isolation is complete. This figure is positioned to draw the viewer into the picture space. However this is contradicted by her oversized hand and arm, placed at right angles to the corner, which serves the dual function of cradling the baby and acting as a barrier to the real world. The impression given that this woman and child exist on a another plane is further conveyed through the floating pillow framing her shoulders and head without realistically supporting her body. The pillow actually rests on a rectangular object denoting the bedhead that supports her back. As in previous works the physical weightlessness of the newborn infant is contrasted to

the mother's heavier frame.

Spencer Bower's characterisaton of this woman is reminiscent of the spiritual quality of earlier ideal mother images found in the portrayals of the Madonna and Child in the Renaissance. Silver and Gold can be seen as a modern secular adaptation of the Madonna and Child. The symbolic colour and the texture of the rich gold paint covering most of the surface substitutes for gold leaf and constitutes a flat two-dimensional field. The faces are glazed with varnish and have a flat translucent quality.

Associations with the iconography and style of Renaissance Madonna and Child paintings is not unusual in the context of New Zealand artistic developments during the 1940s. Spencer Bower shared a common interest with other artists who were experimenting with the integration of traditional religious themes and iconography and modern styles and subjects. This coincided with a revival of interest in the mother and child theme. Other New Zealand artists who treated the mother and child theme during this decade included Rita Angus, Doris Lusk, Colin McCahon and M.T. Woollaston. With the exception of the latter these artists lived in Christchurch. Their interest in the theme is seen in the Group catalogues. All these artists exhibited together in The Group and so shared ideas.

Spencer Bower's treatment of the mother and child theme at Rawene is differentiated from the mother and child works of these artists partly because their models and subjects were family members and friends, an obvious practical reason for their interest in the subject at this time. Lusk, McCahon and Woollaston all had children born during this period. Angus painted perceptive portraits of her sister Jean Jones with her baby son, and a

friend, Christine Cole Catley with her child.[54] Furthermore, their subjects were of European race. The similarities lie in their modernist approach. Their approach to their subject matter is different. Spencer Bower was painting as an outsider looking in, while Lusk and Angus were painting from within intimate domestic situations.

The stylistically diverse paintings from this period suggest Spencer Bower's study of modern art in the late forties. She recorded purchases of a book on Matisse in early 1947 and Fry's *Cezanne* in February 1948. The new approach to design and colour may have also developed from her study with John Weeks during 1946 and 1947. Seeking new forms of expression at this time, in 1947 she painted Boyd Neil Strings,[55] a small oil painting related in style to Silver and Gold. Depicted from an overhead position, the performing string orchestra are presented as a circle of abstracted figures with blank oval faces and elongated heads and bodies.

In Rawene, although Spencer Bower worked in isolation she could draw on the artistic stimulation she had while studying at Elam in Auckland together with May Smith, Alison Pickmere, Helen Brown and Bessie Christie, women artists who were also experimenting with modern styles.

The work of Elam students in the forties generally revealed the combined influences of Fisher's teaching of form drawing and "an awareness of colour stemming from the teaching of Weeks."[56] Spencer Bower began her study with Fisher in order to "complete the study of form begun at the Slade."[57] Fisher upheld the primacy of three-dimensional form and draughtsmanship derived from Renaissance principles. Spencer Bower later felt his training enabled her to do figure studies, leading to her first major

figure series at Rawene. Her study at Elam of his methods led her to pursue her interest in spatial relationships:

> He was interested in the form of the figure but had very little interest in the form or spaces behind or around the figure. He would often put a flat background behind the people he painted. I became further interested in space.[58]

This interest was followed up in the Rawene figurative works and further explored in the later figurative series. Silver and Gold devolved out of these cumulative influences.

Consideration should be given to the relationship between Silver and Gold and Smith's beliefs. The issue is whether the work was intended by Spencer Bower to illustrate Smith's book or whether it can be viewed as an independent work executed without his direct influence. This question arises because it is not reproduced in the book and also because in 1950 Spencer Bower considered it to be the best painting she had done so far.[60] The significance she placed on this work may stem, at least partly, from the knowledge that it was planned and executed without interference.

The painting has a tenuous connection with Smith's book because the title relates it to a stanza from Edmund Spencer's *The Faerie Queen* which is quoted by Smith to support a short philosophical note, entitled 'Perceptions', in which he compares the religious values of the past to those of the present day. He describes the different levels of human perception, that is, "our perceptions of our environment", ranging from "our immediate perceptions of our body" to the "consideration of the probable state of our future environment...[which] includes our prospects of immortality". He continues:

> In the aggregate these perceptions constitute 'the Concrescent Process' of our Becoming, our casuality. All our perceptions,

> including our emotions, are bundled up together into that Whole, which is our inheritance and our Cosmic Epoch. As Whitehead says, 'it is heavy with the contact of things gone by which lay their grip upon our immediate selves.'
>
> *How oft do they their silver bowers leave.*
> *To come to succour us, that succour want,*
> *How oft do they with golden pinions cleave*
> *The flitting skyes, like flying pursuivant*
> *Against foule feendes to aid us militant?*
> (Spencer's *Faery Queen*)[II.viii.2.]
>
> My answer is, 'as often as we bother to sit down in solitude and think.' That, I think, constitutes *inter alia*, the observance of our religious perceptions....Time...must be found for a thinking Philosophy.[60]

Spencer Bower does intimate states of being, from the primitive to the immortal or spiritual state in her contrasting images of women in this work; she also lays stress, as Smith does, on states of perception, from the physical isolation of the three groups to their mental introspection as they contemplate their newborn children, perhaps thinking of both their futures, but these connections are abstract rather than direct.

Her statement that this was her best work to date was made in a letter to Eric Lee-Johnson in June 1950. This letter contains the only indication that the work might have been painted for Smith's book. Spencer Bower was forwarding photographs of works for reproduction in the Arts Yearbook, which Lee-Johnson was editing. This extract from her letter also indicates her dismay at the quality of the reproductions in *Later Notes*:

> I have photographs of the ones for Dr Smith's book but I dare say others would be preferred. Reeds made a *shocking* job of the paintings. They entirely altered the expression on Dr Smith's face [in Process and Reality] and gave one Maori girl a different face altogether! 'Silver and Gold' is my best painting so far but of course the predominating colours were the most difficult to photograph that could have been chosen as a colour scheme![61]

This suggests that the work was rejected on technical grounds. However, Spencer Bower did not forward it to Reeds in Wellington to be photographed in September 1949.[62] If it was intended for the book, it could

only have been rejected earlier in 1949 by the original publishers, Caxton Press, in Christchurch.

The publication arrangements for Spencer Bower's book illustratons illuminates the values placed on an artist's work in New Zealand at this time. There was no formal contract between the producer and Smith, who commissioned the work, unlike Spencer Bower's written contractual arrangement with author and publisher to provide pen and ink illustrations for Alan Mulgan's book *First With The Sun*, published by Dents in London in 1939.[63] It is unlikely that Spencer Bower was paid for her work as she had to write to the publishers in 1950 requesting a payment. They referred her to Smith as the party responsible for reimbursement, as he had commissioned the illustrations. Yet Smith had advised her in mid 1949 that he had instructed Reeds to pay her. A sum was not mentioned. It seems the matter ended there. One wonders if the same attitude would be applied to a male commercial artist.

Spencer Bower's indignant response to the publisher's interference with her paintings reveals a contradictory attitude when compared with her readiness to comply with Smith's dictates. In March 1950 she wrote to Reeds: "Though people would not consider altering the author's words yet an artist's [sic] does not get the same 'Touch me not' Treatment."[64] Her attitude towards Smith's influence on her work for his book was later recollected to Alison Mitchell:

> She felt that although in many ways he 'didn't have a clue about painting', and the ideas for the illustrations were largely his, as an illustrator she had to put herself a certain amount in subjection to the Author's wishes. 'I suppose it was a new line of country; I hadn't really found my own interpretations of what he said. I was doing to a large extent what he wanted'.[65]

Smith certainly drew preliminary sketches for some of the drawings, which

he referred to as 'Symbols'.[66] He also defined the content of Process and Reality,[67] 1948, in which he is depicted posing prominently in the foreground, obviously master of his environment. Behind and below him are two oblique rows of manual and professional hospital staff, pakeha men and Maori and pakeha women, preparing food in the Rawene hospital kitchen. To their left is a vista of the Hokianga River region; to their right a contrasting urban night scene shows the smoking chimneys and lighted windows of a row of dark uniform houses. To Smith, 'Process and Reality' are distinguished by Nature: Man's (sic) altruistic, loving nature is here representd by the doctor's staff and environment whereas the dismal urban scene represents the dark reality of Man's destructive materialistic nature; Man has evolved from ape to the predatory mutant that has invented the atomic bomb.[68] The natural light and darkness of day and night can be read metaphorically as human qualities: light signifies enlightenment and darkness, ignorance. Spencer Bower painted this large oil in predominantly light gray tones, providing a sombre contrast to the maternity works. Its propagandist content makes it unique in her work. It suggests this was the kind of subject-matter Smith had in mind when he requested a painting to illustrate his book.

Her willingness to subject herself to the author's wishes can be accounted for by her high regard for Smith. Following her arrival at Rawene she was overwhelmed by the kindness of Smith and his associate staff. She found companionship in Lucy Smith, who had worked alongside her husband as the hospital anaesthetist for thirty-four years.[69] Lucy Smith is depicted with her husband in the watercolour, Coffee [70] 1949, reading in their lounge [Fig.20]. However he is the subject of most of the drawings and paintings produced during Spencer Bower's stay at their home in the winter. His personality was overwhelming. Spencer Bower described him at the time

as the "Prophet of the North",[71] as he was commonly known, because of his appearance and his charismatic personality. Her impression of Smith is conveyed in his portrait, Dr Smith of Hokianga [72], 1948 [Fig.21]. Smith was unorthodox and overbearing in appearance, character and in his dealings with people. A social reformer, he usually achieved his goals, at least locally and sometimes unscrupulously, by adhering to the cornerstone of his personal philosophy, that the end justifies the means.[73] The artist, however, felt that he had exerted a positive effect on her long after she left Rawene. In a radio interview with Jack Shallcrass in 1979 she said of Smith "it was the personality of the man, he could breathe confidence into people you know, it helps."[74] This may explain why Spencer Bower held her Rawene mother and child works in high regard and expressed this period as being a highpoint in her life. In 1981 she denied to Grace Adams the quality of her portrait of Smith by saying this came from his personality. Her insecurity represented her position as a woman in the artistic world, where gaining a man's approval was needed to give her work legitimacy.

Spencer Bower held these works in high regard but they were not well known until the 1977 Retrospective exhibition which prompted Batten's response, perhaps because their unusual subject matter and media did not readily fit preconceived expectations of her work, perhaps because the mother and child subject was not widely promoted. Even in 1980, the catalogue writer for the feminist exhibition, *Mothers*, [75] was unaware of the works on this theme during the 1940s by women artists, including Spencer Bower and Angus; in contrast McCahon's were well known. Angus's mother and child portraits have been subsequently interpreted by male writers according to the dominant social attitudes. In the catalogue to her 1982 Retrospective exhibition they are esoterically and patronisingly described as "prescient

images for the role of women in New Zealand."[76]

The reception given by the male art critics to the Rawene and other figure studies in Spencer Bower's 1977 exhibition ranged from overall surprise and praise by the majority to patronising indifference in Auckland. Batten's comments are supported by Neil Rowe's commending review in the Wellington *Evening Post* on March 4, 1978:

> I had known her as an accomplished watercolourist and painter of strong high country landscapes. I had not, before now, been aware of the wide range of her work....superbly sensitive studies of Maori women and children in the far north painted in 1943 [sic] and Pacific Islanders in 1960.

The earlier reception of her Rawene work by critics and writers may have been partly derived from the poor reproductions of Rawene and Silver and Gold in the *Arts Yearbook* in 1950 and 1951. In *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting* her work of the 1940s was given a blanket rejection by the authors:

> Another woman painter...also associated with the Rutland Group was Olivia Spencer-Bower, but her work had declined in quality since her Canterbury days. Only after she had severed her connections with Auckland did her work regain some of its former qualities.[77]

This interpretation is contrasted to Alison Mitchell's description of the Rawene period as "a cathartic moment in her career," when she was able to concentrate on her figure studies "without the hampering effects of a critical artistic climate which always had certain expectations of her work."[78]

An examination of the circumstances of the production of the Rawene paintings has shown that Spencer Bower was given the opportunity to observe and interpret her impressions of the experience of motherhood in the maternity ward when Dr Smith commissioned her to produce illustrations

for his book, while she recuperated at Rawene. She depicted subjects that were important to her as a woman and examined the nature of motherhood. However, because she worked from a position within existing social and artistic structures her ideas were necessarily circumscribed. The circumstances of the commission influenced her interpretation of the Maori mother. Her works on the maternity theme were altered and given a political slant by Smith when he used them to illustrate his ideas and beliefs. This examination of the production and reception of the Rawene mother and child works may contribute to an understanding of the conditions under which women artists produce their art. Her experience of producing this series may have contributed to Spencer Bower's observations that women could produce different art under different conditions.

ENDNOTES

1. G.M. Smith, *Later Notes from a Backblocks Hospital*, Wellington, 1949.

2. Juliet Batten, 'Emerging from Underground: The Women's Art Movement in New Zealand', *Spiral 5*, Wellington, 1982, p. 28.

3. Ibid.

4. Janet Paul, "Women Artists in New Zealand", *Women in New Zealand Society*, eds. P. Bunkle and B. Hughes, Auckland, 1980, p. 201.

5. Alison Mitchell (Allie Eagle), a founding member of the Christchurch women artist's group in 1975 and organizer that year of "Six Women Artists", the first feminist women's art exhibition mounted in New Zealand, worked with Spencer Bower for three years preparing for the artist's retrospective exhibition which opened at the McDougall gallery in November, 1977. She has confirmed in discussion with me in April 1987 Spencer Bower's interest in women's art issues at this time.

6. Grace Adams, "Afternoon Tea with Olivia Spencer Bower", *Art New Zealand*, No. 26 (1983), pp. 20-21.

7. G.M. Smith, W.W. Grant, H. Chappell, *Plans, Plots and Appraisals from the Backblocks*, Christchurch, 1945, pp. 6-7.

8. Erik Schwimmer, 'The Aspirations of the Contemporary Maori', *The Maori People in the Nineteen-Sixties*, Auckland, 1968, p. 17.

9. A. Mitchell, *Olivia Spencer Bower Retrospective* catalogue, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, 1977, n. pag.

10. Olivia Spencer Bower, 1948 Diary, Robert McDougall Art Gallery Archives.

11. The artist interviewed by Jack Shallcrass on Radio New Zealand program, 'Looking Back', 1979.

12. SPENCER BOWER, Catherine Olivia Orme, 1948 Diary extract, MS Papers 1360: Folder 2, Alexander Turnbull Library, NLNZ

13. Rawene, reproduced facing p. 44; Security, illustration p. 178.

14. Sketch books and preparatory drawings, Olivia Spencer Bower Foundation Collection, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.

15. See notes 26-28.

16. G. Kemble Welch, *Doctor Smith: Hokianga's `King of the North'*, Auckland, 1965, p. 141.

17. Letter to Rosa Spencer Bower from the Masonic Hotel, Rawene, April 25 1948, Spencer Bower Papers, Claxby.

18. 1948 Diary, McDougall Archives.

19. E.H. McCormick, *Works of Frances Hodgkins in New Zealand*, London, 1954, p. 54.

20. Maori Baby, 1948, Pencil, 205 x 195mm, signed L.L. Olivia Spencer Bower, Collection of the Olivia Spencer Bower Foundation, Christchurch. Reproduced in *Olivia Spencer Bower Retrospective* catalogue, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, 1977, Cat. no.32A; *New Zealand Arts Year Book*, No.6, 1950, p. 68.

21. Laura Knight, *Oil Paint and Grease Paint*, London, 1936, facing p.281. Spencer Bower said in her interview with Shallcrass [op cit.] that Laura Knight was the source of inspiration for her paintings of the Russian Ballet in Christchurch in 1937-38. This interest in Knight's book and subject matter is also evidenced in Spencer Bower's Hagley Park Circus series of 1949.

22. Ibid, p. 288.

23. Mitchell.

24. Korewha, 1948, Pencil, 185 x 245mm, signed lower left, Collection of the Alexander Turnbull Library.

25. The whereabouts of this drawing is unknown.

26. Untitled (Maori mother and child), 1948, Watercolour, 255 x 276mm, unsigned, Collection of the Olivia Spencer Bower Foundation, Christchurch.

27. Untitled (Maori woman holding child), 1948, Oil on hardboard, 420 x 510mm, verso: Portrait of Rudi Gopas, Collection of the Alexander Turnbull Library.

28. W.B. Sutch, *The Quest for Security in New Zealand: 1840-1966*, London, 1966, p. 247.

29. Smith, p. 178.

30. F. Truby King, *Feeding and Care of Baby*, Christchurch, 1940, Cover Illustration.

31. Smith, p. 135. He writes "'It is the task of reason', Whitehead says, 'to understand and purge the symbols on which humanity depends.'"

32. Bill Cumming talking to Janice Wallis about Olivia Spencer Bower, 1985, W. Cumming Cassette Tape. Also Spencer Bower Diaries, 1943-46, McDougall Archives.

33. Mary Cassatt, The Boating Party, 1893-94, Oil, 902 x 1172mm,

National Gallery of Art, Washington, reproduced in G. Pollock, *Mary Cassatt*, London, 1980, Pl.XXVIII.

34. Mary Cassatt, The Bath, 1892, Oil, 1004 x 660 mm., Art Institute of Chicago, reproduced in Pollock, Pl.XXVII.

35. Pollock, p. 8.

36. Mary Cassatt, Sleepy Nicolle, c.1900, Pastel, 480 x 535mm, Art Institute of Chicago, reproduced in Pollock, fig. 48, p. 115.

37. Pollock, p.115.

38. PAUL, Janet, Papers, Acc. 80.41, Alexander Turnbull Library, NLNZ.

39. Rawene Mothers, 1948, Watercolour, 510 x 400mm, signed and dated, Private Collection, Wellington.

40. Rawene, 1948, Oil on board, 513 x 416 mm., signed L.R. Olivia Spencer Bower, Private Collection, Christchurch (exhibited in 1968 as Rawene Mothers), reproduced in Smith, facing p.44, and in *New Zealand Arts Year Book*, No.7, 1951, p. 53.

41. Spencer Bower painted out this woman's figure at later date, prior to 1968. See fig.17.

42. Stone, p.3.

43. Spencer Bower, Note to the Publisher A.H. and A.W. Reed, Wellington, September 1949, Claxby Papers.

44. Stone, p. 2. nb. Smith, conversely, informed lay people about birth processes through his books.

45. The imagery also resembles Knight's description of the Black maternity ward in her book, p. 288.

46. Kemble Welch, p. 76.

47. Letter to Eric Lee-Johnson, 1 June 1950, Claxby Papers.

48. Mother and Child, c. 1945, Oil, location unknown, reproduced in *New Zealand Arts Yearbook*, No. 2, 1946, p. 41. Also Spencer Bower Diaries 1944-45, McDougall Archives.

49. Spencer Bower knew that the Hokianga was commonly held to be the "cradle of the races". An account given by a Ngapuhi elder in 1955 identifies the Northland tribe with Kupe through a Hokianga landmark, Ramaroa, "the sign mountain-which gives the sign 'Ao-tea-roa'...a bright, misty, grey torch." C. and C. Manson, *Tides of Hokianga*, Wellington, 1956, p. 24.

50. Letter to J.H. Richards, Production Manager, A.H. and A.W. Reed, 9 March 1950, Claxby Papers.

51. Michael Dunn, 'Some Aspects of Portraiture of the Maori',in *Face Value: A Study in Maori Portraiture*, Exhibition catalogue, Dunedin Art Gallery, 1975, p. 2.

52. Smith, p. 44.

53. Silver and Gold, 1948, Oil on board, 570 x 388 mm, signed lower left, Collection of the Olivia Spencer Bower Foundation, Christchurch, reproduced: *New Zealand Arts Year Book*, No.6, 1950, p. 84.

54. Rita Angus, Mother and Child, 1942, watercolour, 462 x 316mm, Private Collection, Wellington, and Untitled (Mother and Child), 1945, Oil, 592 x 407 mm, Private collection, Picton, both reproduced in *Rita Angus* Exhibition catalogue, Wellington, 1982, pp. 154-5.

55. Boyd Neil Strings, 1947, Oil on board, 392 x 448 mm, signed lower left, Cumming Collection, Christchurch.

56. R. Tizard, 'Some Recollections of the Elam School of Art', Unpublished Paper, Collection of the Author, Auckland, n.d.

57. J. Paul, ATL Papers, op.cit.

58. Mitchell, n.p.

59. Letter to Lee-Johnson, op.cit.

60. Smith, pp. 189-90.

61. Letter to Lee-Johnson, op.cit.

62. Note to Reeds, op.cit.

63. Correspondence with Mulgan and the Publisher, Claxby Papers.

64. Claxby Papers, op.cit.

65. Mitchell.

66. Letter to Spencer Bower, 30 April 1949, Claxby Papers.

67. Process and Reality, 1949, Oil on board, Collection of the Olivia Spencer Bower Foundation, Christchurch, (exhibited as Kitchen Philosophy in 1950), reproduced in Smith, facing p. 125.

68. Smith, pp. 125-6.

69. Kemble Welch, p. 86.

70. Coffee, 1949, Watercolour, 400 x 555mm, signed lower right, Private Collection, Nelson, reproduced in Smith, facing p. 108.

71. Diary Extract, Spencer Bower Papers, ATL, op cit.

72. Dr Smith of Hokianga, 1948, Oil on board, 420 x 390mm, signed lower right, Collection of the Alexander Turnbull Library.

73. A.F. Giles, 'Dr G.M. Smith', in *Northland: A Regional Magazine*, No.7, August 1959, p. 13.

74. Shallcrass, op.cit.

75. B. Lonie, 'The subject of motherhood as treated in New Zealand painting', *Mothers*, The Women's Gallery Exhibition Catalogue, Wellington, 1980, p.5.

76. Ron Brownson, 'Symbolism and the Generation of Meaning in Rita Angus's Painting', in Rita Angus exhibition catalogue, op.cit., p. 84.

77. G. Brown and H. Keith, An Introduction to New Zealand Painting. 1839 - 1960, Auckland, 1969, p. 133.

78. Mitchell.

II

PRIVATE SPHERES: STUDIES OF WOMEN AGING

Early in 1949 Olivia Spencer Bower returned to Christchurch from Rawene. For the next eleven years she lived with her elderly mother in their home in Memorial Avenue until Rosa Spencer Bower's death in March 1960 at the age of 95.[1] Working within the constraints and limitations which caring for her mother represented, Spencer Bower responded in the 1950s and 1960s by painting a series of studies which observe and scrutinize the process of growing old and becoming dependent: these are a series of drawings and watercolour sketches done in the 1950s of Rosa Spencer Bower reading and relaxing in their home which formed the basis for the development of two series of paintings done in the sixties, 'The Literates' studies of women readers dating from the early to mid-sixties, and the 'Getting About' series examining the elderly disabled woman's determined efforts to be independent, painted later in the decade. A portrait of Rosa Spencer Bower dining concludes these studies. These works will be analysed formally in terms of the development of her project, examining the growth of the series from the watercolour studies and drawings of her mother of the 1950s into the statements about life and death and age, that is, the shared human experience which the extended series constitute. It is therefore also relevant to consider the specific circumstances out of which these works developed before examining them in detail. The chapter concludes by considering these works by Spencer Bower within the context of works by other women artists which have dealt with similar themes.

During the 1950s, when Spencer Bower had less time to concentrate on painting, the production of her work dropped markedly in comparison to

her output during the previous two decades. This is evident from an analysis of works exhibited at the two exhibition venues available to artists in Canterbury from the late 1920s until the late 1950s, the annual Art Society's exhibition and annual exhibition of The Group. From the time she first exhibited with the Canterbury Society of Arts in 1926,until 1950, she exhibited on average eight works annually, mainly watercolour landscapes. In 1951 she exhibited six landscapes painted during a holiday in Queenstown in August in the previous year, but thereafter she virtually ceased to exhibit until 1960.[2] She did, however, maintain her exhibits with The Group at former levels, with an average of seven works. This preference to exhibit the work she did produce in the Group Shows may have been a repercussion of the 'Pleasure Garden incident' of 1949; a personal political gesture showing her opposition to the conservative faction which had welded power and influenced public attittudes to art through the Canterbury Art Society. In this way, perhaps through the only means possible at the time, she registered her artistic autonomy and her identification with the local avant - garde.

Spencer Bower expressed her need for personal autonomy by involving herself in cultural and social activities outside the domestic scene, including administration of The Group and Little Film Society. From 1950 she was involved in Theatre Arts Guild productions with other Group members. In 1955 a friend wrote to her: "your social activities take all your time and somehow you have lost the drive or mood to paint." [3] While this involvement shows that she was not continually housebound, it does suggest that she responded psychologically to her situation by avoiding the source and site of her conflict. She could not lose herself in the landscape, so she compromised and lost herself in other work. She could not paint uninterrupted because she did not have a separately located studio to

work in. Like other Canterbury artists at that time she worked in a studio set up at her home.

The effect of the conflict between roles was expressed at the time she applied for a New Zealand Art Societies Association Fellowship Award in 1958 when she wrote:

> I apologise for the personal nature connected with my application but a conflict of duties has made this position rather extraordinary....The work submitted can only be a suggestion of my capabilities as it has had to be done during brief holidays from house, garden and nursing duties....In more ways than one this award would make it possible as other members of my family might consider that I was worthy of release to carry on my work.[4]

Her apologetic attitude is characteristic of the contradictions between the private and public lives of women artists. To have rejected her domestic caring role openly and outrightly would have been seen socially as an immoral act. To have abandoned painting completely would be seen to fulfil the attitude that she was not a talented, professional artist, worthy of serious consideration. It was not an isolated experience but an example of the contradictions faced by many women who are artists.[5] In an article on Jacqueline Fahey, "Artist and Self Image", Elizabeth Eastmond comments how that "in New Zealand in the nineteen-fifties...the sense of working against artistic and social convention was felt particularly strongly by women artists." [6] Fahey found this in her own experience, recalling one fellow artist confidently pronouncing: "If you continue painting now it means you're a lesbian and another predicting an immediate loss of the ability to create with the birth of children."[7]

Spencer Bower worked within the constraints of her caretaking role during the fifties to produce drawings and sketches of her mother occupied in her daily activities. The drawings include studies of her mother occupied in

activities such as preparing food, sewing or reading. The watercolour studies of Rosa Spencer Bower depict her seated in a chair absorbed in reading a newspaper or a letter. In Rosa Spencer Bower [8] a sleeping cat sprawls on her lap, indicating that she has been seated for some time [Fig.23]. In another work showing her in the same setting the elderly woman has fallen asleep clutching a letter in her hand.[9] A wooden crutch lying close by signifies her physical handicap. These images convey the idea that old age brings long periods of immobility, confinement to the home and dependence. In Woman Reading[10] Rosa Spencer Bower is seated in a seagrass chair near a window [Fig.22]. She leans back to catch the light as she holds a newspaper close to her face, scrutinising the contents. This action suggests that her failing sight makes reading difficult, as she is sitting in a sunny, light-filled space. The impression of fresh morning sunlight is given by the areas of white paper left clean of wash or merely tinted with colour. The strong light has the effect of bleaching her form, while the details of her surroundings are rendered amorphous, almost to abstraction, by vigorous expressionist brushstrokes. Without the redeeming touch of a warm pink accent against her cool blue dress this could be a cold, depressing painting.

Spencer Bower's informal approach to her subject-matter links this work with the approach adopted by the Impressionists. A sense of immediacy and spontaneity in recording a momentary gesture or expression is always present in these drawings and watercolour portraits. Underlying this is Spencer Bower's draughtmanship and her ability to adapt the watercolour medium to her expressive purposes, a consequence of her years of practice and knowledge of its possibilities.

Rosa Spencer Bower's features are merely suggested behind her glasses. This

convention was later developed in works in the 'Getting About' and Spinners series where in the process of exploring relationships between people the facial features of individual women were generalised or eliminated to suggest their feelings of isolation and self-absorption in their activity. In Woman Reading the newspaper also acts as a barrier between the subject and her observer, to suggest the reader's withdrawal into her own world.

The intimacy and informality associated with domestic life is suggested by her appearance and pose. Her white hair is contained in a hairnet and her body, thickened by age, is casually seated. The compositional lines draw attention to her hands firmly grasping the newspaper. Spencer Bower frequently focused attention on a subject's hands, to indicate her or his activity, as seen in the earlier Rawene series and later as a central element of the Spinners series. In later portraiture the gestures of the hands are sometimes contrasted with the facial expression to reveal different sides of the personality.[11] Here the shapes and gestures of the hands echo the pattern of the seagrass chair plaiting. The fine pencil lines and light washes are juxtaposed with the thick, angular brushstrokes defining the blue shawl draped around her shoulders. This expressive treatment gives an impression of her strong personality.

Without sentiment, Spencer Bower has conveyed the effects of failing eyesight associated with aging and experienced by many elderly persons. Yet there is no suggestion of mental degeneration. Her mother's absorption in the newspaper suggests her mind is active, as is her interest in public affairs. For the housebound person in the 1950s, the newspaper formed a vital communication link with the outside world. Bill Pearson put this another way in *Fretful Sleepers*, his interpretation of the "provincial mind" in the 1950s, when he wrote "we all read the newspaper to find out what everyone else is

reading."[12]

The theme of women reading has been well established in art traditions, although representations of women reading newspapers, and similarly, of elderly women, are less common, newspapers having been associated with the public sphere and men.[13] Spencer Bower drew on her own experiences for her interpretation of this theme by representing her mother preoccupied in reading the newspaper in a domestic interior setting. In the watercolour portrait, Rosa Spencer Bower, the artist revealed the intimacy of their daily lives by depicting her mother in her dressing gown and slippers with a sleeping cat sprawled on her lap [Fig.23]. She was possibly painted at a time when she was recuperating from her accident in 1953. In this composition she appears to sit in a confined space. She is placed on the left side of a horizontal composition where the viewer looks down at her past the barrier formed by the table and lamp. The angle and scale of the objects on the right side of the picture creates a feeling of distance. Her face is framed by the lines of the table edge, lamp, newspaper and the picture frame.

As in the other studies of her Rosa Spencer Bower does not convey the idea that she is conscious of being painted. Her expression is one of total absorption in the newspaper and oblivion to the artist's presence. Her concerned expression and tensely set mouth describes her reaction to the news. Spencer Bower concentrates on the subject and the newspaper is merely suggested by subtle charcoal accents. In comparison to the abbreviated brushmarks and strong tonal contrasts defining the subject matter at left, the roses and table dominating the right half of the composition are glowing with colour. The spatial relationship between objects is ambiguous, the tilted table demonstrating Spencer Bower's study of Cezanne's principles. The

play between the formal elegance of the still life arrangement on the right of the composition and the informality of the portrait study on the left is also brought out in the contrast between the shorthand treatment of the cat and the woman's stubby fingers with the smooth modelling of the rounded lamp and bowl. The calligraphic mark-making resembles this aspect of France Hodgkins' later style. The treatment of the cat resembles the one in Hodgkins' Flowers and a Cat, 1941, where it is obtrusively placed on a polished table before a round bowl and vase of flowers.[14] In Rosa Spencer Bower the scruffy, indolent cat contradicts the harmonious, restrained mood of the still life of lamp, bowl and roses. The lustrous sheen of the polished table surface is created by fluid washes. Spencer Bower also incorporated this uncharacteristic mirror-like sheen in landscapes and still life paintings dating from the mid-forties until the mid-sixties and in later portraits. The mauve tonalities complement the yellow roses dominating the foreground space. Spencer Bower rarely painted roses, so their inclusion here could be intended to signify their association with the subject, Rosa Spencer Bower. Roses were a major subject of her paintings. She is also named after this flower.

Their inclusion could indicate the love of flowers shared by mother and daughter. Spencer Bower was preoccupied with tending her garden in the 1950s. Since the roses in this work occupy the painter's space in the foreground, it may attach another meaning, perhaps of compromise, to this work. Bethell expressed this idea in her poem 'Fortune'.

> Others may sail away to the sea-coasts of Bohemia,
> Cathay, and Coromandel, Malay, and Patagonia,
> Hong Kong, and Halifax, Bombay, and Pernambuco,
> Frisco and Singapore, and all the world's fine harbours-
> Wistfully we may watch them loosed from our limitations,-
> But for us, at least, roses, here.[15]

This suggestion of isolation is more evident in another work showing her mother in the same setting, Untitled (Rosa Spencer Bower sleeping).[16] She is depicted in her chair at night and the setting is illuminated by the table lamp. Her chair is surrounded by conveniently placed side tables while the paper and envelopes scattered around her suggest that reading and writing letters preoccupied much of her time. While the simplified arrangement of Rosa Spencer Bower is more successful compositionally, this work provides a different insight into the lonely but regulated lifestyle of an elderly and disabled person. As in Woman Reading, blue drapery is juxtaposed with her ashen face, which is also contrasted with a decorative red hat and green patterned shawl placed on a table with her crutches, as if to denote the contrast between the dullness of her indoor lifestyle with the brighter moments spent outdoors. She has fallen asleep reading a letter, which she still clutches in her hand. The scene is made more poignant by the shadow that falls across her face in the lamplight. Her dependency is also implied by the wooden crutches leaning against the adjacent table. Spencer Bower's observations of her mother led to these studies which demonstrate her sympathetic understanding of the nature of aging.

Drawing on her observations and experiences she utilised these images to develop the theme of women readers into a broader study of human relationships. The subject in Woman Reading forms the central motif in two small watercolours composed of three images of Rosa Spencer Bower reading, Three Seated Women, [17] [Fig.24] and Untitled (Three Women Reading[18] [Fig.25]. The design of these unusual works resembles a bas relief. The three figures are rhythmically aligned in a row seated slightly apart. As in Woman Reading and other works in this series they are set against an abstracted rectangular shape. In Three Seated Women a small

vase-like object placed on this indicates it is a sideboard or similar piece of furniture. This is used to link the three subjects together in an interior setting. Each figure is a loose rendition of other portraits of Rosa Spencer Bower although in Three Seated Women they are treated like caricatures as Spencer Bower accentuates their reading glasses to define the theme. The colour harmonies and mood are reversed in each work so that in Three Seated Women muted cool slate hues predominate, while a rich burnt umber dominates over the blues of the figures in the other work.

The interest of these two works derives from the ideas presented in them. The colours harmonies are ones which Spencer Bower used in the late 1950s so they probably date from this period. They are possibly exploratory compositions for The Literates, c. 1966, as this thematically related painting includes two of the figures [Fig.26].[19] In addition, the repetitious motif, predominantly of three similar figures in a triptych format, was a major aspect of the Spinners series which preoccupied Spencer Bower in the late sixties and the seventies. The 1956 Henry Moore Exhibition of sculpture and drawings which came to Christchurch was possibly the catalyst for this arrangement. Spencer Bower kept a newspaper photograph of three Moore sculptures of female figures grouped in this format, as well as other clippings in her scrapbook. In these two works however, Spencer Bower adapted Moore's arrangement and created an entirely different imagery and mood.

The Literates, was the first work to be exhibited by Spencer Bower on this theme. It was first shown at the Group Show in 1967.[20] It depicts two elderly women engrossed in reading. The similarities found in this work and the images of Rosa Spencer Bower in several watercolour and mixed media paintings executed in the 1950s show that Spencer Bower was

producing variations on an image and theme in different media. This working procedure has already been seen in the Rawene works. In The Literates she also developed the idea begun in the Rawene work, Silver and Gold, of incorporating independent but interrelated figure units into one work. Each may exist in different dimensions of time and space. They were conceptualised as memories rather than portraits.

The two women are placed close to the foreground in a freely painted neutral setting. They are seated near each other but they are distanced by their lack of communication. The figures are placed at right angles to the picture plane so that the woman on the right turns her back on the other, who seems similarly unaware of the other's presence. By placing each figure in its own space on the left and right sides of the picture Spencer Bower has suggested that each woman is isolated and constricted within a private, silent world. Rather than communicating with each other one reads a letter and the other reads a magazine. The idea of psychological as well as physical distance between the women is suggested in the central atmospheric cloud of blue paint that separates them. The burnt sienna colour surrounding them locates the women in an abstracted interior space. Behind the blue haze, walls painted in yellow ochre are indicated above a blurred horizontal line. Two smudgy grey shapes at each side serve the dual purpose of closing the picture spatially as well as denoting a door and window. Colour links the women in character and situation. Blue tonal modulations are blended throughout their clothing. The local colour gives the forms a plastic quality. This oppressive blue ground surrounds and threatens to envelop them.

The two women have the appearance of the familiar 'granny' type of elderly woman, popularly characterised as a slightly eccentric, lonely figure who is often a source of amusement as well as pity. Vincent O'Sullivan has noted

that in post-war New Zealand prose "old age is a predominant...[if not] obsessive theme." [21] In these stories aging is associated with social isolation. Spencer Bower indicated the effects of physical aging by details as well as by the women's general appearance and stance. For example the woman on the left who is seated in a seagrass chair wears a thick crepe bandage on one leg. This figure is a direct transposition of the subject in Rosa Spencer Bower, c. 1955, a crayon and wash work, apart from the detail of the bandage which is not shown.[22] In The Literates she wears clumpy old fashioned shoes and a shawl is draped around her shoulders. Her features are not defined, old age having been indicated instead by her white hair and round glasses, as well as the stolid heaviness of her body. She sits firmly upright, supported by her feet set apart in a stance common among old people. She is holding a magazine close to her face as she keenly absorbs the information it conveys.

In the crayon and wash version the sheen on her garments is suggested by crayon rubbings in a deeper blue shade, whereas in the oil painting areas of surface paint have been scraped off and scratched, exposing the white basecoat to achieve a similar textural effect. Spencer Bower was also using coloured crayons in landscape paintings around the mid fifties. In this work a fine crayon line is also used to delineate the outline of the figure. The interior setting itself is indicated in a amorphous expressive manner, similar in technique and mood to the more gestural loose technique evident in many of her landscapes of this period.[23]

The other subject in The Literates is treated similarly. The image of the alert stooped woman avidly reading a letter in the mixed media work, Olivia's Mother,[24] [Fig.27] c. 1955, has been interpreted in oils. Details of setting

that might distract attention from the two subjects are again eliminated. In any case, the figures in both these watercolours share the same background: a room sparsely furnished with the object perhaps denoting a sideboard, that also appears in the two paintings of three women reading. However in the oil painting the mood has changed. This has been effected partly by the blurring of the facial features, resulting in an alteration of the characterisation. In the mixed media work the responsive expression of expectation and pleasure to the letter which shows in Rosa Spencer Bower's face is communicated with warmth and wit by strong characterisation, the latter seen particularly in the incisive lines representing the mouth and pert nose. Certainly her avid interest is still evident in the characterisation of the oil painting but her response now appears to strike a sombre and serious note rather than one of warmth and happiness. The imagery of The Literates, like the title, is contradictory in its presentation of the two elderly women locked into their own worlds.

The thematic ideas expressed in this work are generated from Spencer Bower's personal experiences, and in this sense the work is autobiographical. However, similarities can be found between her method of using a portrait image of two women and in the ideas expressed by some nineteenth-century artists and some contemporary New Zealand artists. Double portraits of bourgeois women engaged in reading or other intellectual or creative pursuits in a domestic setting were popular in the mid to late nineteenth-century. Impressionist artists such as Cassatt and Berthe Morisot treated this subject because they could draw on their own experiences and family for their subject-matter. One common factor is Spencer Bower's use of the same model to represent two persons. Morisot adopts this practice in her oil painting The Sisters, 1869, where two young

women are shown in a similarly arranged composition [Fig.28] .[25] The stable horizontal format is appropriate for their shared mood of quiet introspection. Morisot conveys their symmetry of mind and spirit through repetition. From a contemporary viewpoint, the double image expresses the empty uniformity of their feminine bourgeois lifestyle. A similar mood is expressed in Henriette Browne's moralising realist painting La Lecture de la Bible, 1857, which Spencer Bower would have been familiar with. Browne also appears to use one model for both subjects.[26]

Contemporary New Zealand artist Louise Lewis also appears to utilise this practice in her acrylic painting of two elderly women in a modern interior setting, Untitled, 1974 [Fig.29].[27] While Lewis uses a hard-edged realist style, the ideas expressed in the imagery relate this work to Spencer Bower's. She depicts two women who are divided by their withdrawal into their private thoughts, yet united by the uniformity of their domestic role. One knits and the other embroiders against a backdrop of suburban houses. The sense of a shared experience, rather than a shared model, relates Spencer Bower's work to Jacqueline Fahey's painting Sisters Communing, 1974.[28] Fahey edges her subjects out of the picture and uses the barrier of tables and domestic paraphernalia, rather than an abstract painterly barrier, to describe the lack of communication in a younger generation of women.

When Rosa Spencer Bower broke her leg in 1953 her subsequent disability increased Olivia Spencer Bower's domestic and nursing responsibilities. These experiences gave rise to the 'Getting About' series of acrylic paintings, which were developed from drawings done after the accident [Fig.30].[29] The first Getting About, c. 1969, was exhibited in the Canterbury Society of Arts Summer Exhibition in October, 1970 [Fig.32].[30]

In the 1970 Group Show, held in November, Spencer Bower exhibited two paintings of an elderly woman walking with crutches, Getting About,[31] 1969 [Fig.33], and Springtime, c. 1969.[32] This was followed in the 1971 Group Show with Getting about No.3, c. 1970 [Fig.34].[33]

In the three works entitled 'Getting About' Spencer Bower has created a psychological barrier between the solitary subject and her audience by facing the figure away so that the face is hidden. The sense of psychological and physical withdrawal from society found in the former works is heightened. Rejection as well as determination is conveyed in the image of the hunched and crippled old woman struggling to walk with her wooden crutches. Her complete dependence on the crutches as her means of getting about is indicated by the way they appear to be permanently moulded into her body. In the Getting About in the Holm Collection her struggle to regain independence is symbolically expressed in the splayed redundant feet which she trys to direct towards the distant horizon. In the Getting About in the Best Collection the horizon is eliminated and she is portrayed on a blue colour plane struggling towards an unseen destination.

In the Getting About in the Best Collection the woman's figure is silhouetted against a flat cerulean blue plane which has been overlaid with a red glaze. By using these colour harmonies and tonal values a still mood and atmosphere is achieved. The red accents give resonance and solidity to the blue surface which forms an integral part of the imagery, representing the spatial setting through which the woman moves. The impetus given by the forward inclination and the weight of her body is pushing her slowly and inexorably out of the picture. The colour plane can be understood as ethereal space as well as physical space. The bright light which illuminates

the figure and the horizon in the work in the Holm Collection is replaced here with a faint light falling on the woman's body. It accentuates the plastic shape of her large, solid form and the gentle rhythmic movement of the folds of her skirt. In contrast, her legs and feet are treated as unmodulated flat planes to accentuate their redundancy. Her burgundy coloured jacket and gray skirt are garments normally associated with the winter season. In combination with the dull wintery light which falls on her, this suggests that the natural cycle of her life is finished. The clear blue is the colour of summer skies, so that the juxtaposition evokes this association of the natural seasons with the cycle of human life.

The work can be interpreted on various levels, all contained in an economical imagery, although the sense of isolation and stoicism is readily associated with the everyday life experiences of the aged. The woman's contorted figure conveys the meaning of the title. The difficulty of her struggle to retain independence is skillfully conveyed economically through exaggerated distortion of form rather than colour. Her tiny, partly visible head is twisted sideways and bent down in concentration. All that is seen of it in this back view is a glimpse of her forehead and white hair arranged in a bun. Contrasting this with reduced scale, the size of the torso is exaggerated, particularly around the shoulders, so that she takes on the appearance of a hunchback. It expresses the struggle of the mind over the body, and the overriding desire to retain independence expressed by elderly people.

This was the first of the series to be exhibited and, unlike The Literates, it received a response in the media. Following its exhibition at the Canterbury Society of Arts in 1970 the *Christchurch Press* reviewer Trevor Moffitt compared the stylistic treatment ot the Japanese print, but he considered style of secondary importance to the artist's sensibility:

> Olivia Spencer Bower's acrylic painting "Getting About" is a very economical work that could be compared with a Japanese print for the simple colour plane and the off centre placement of the figure of an elderly woman, but its graphic qualities take second place to the sympathy and humanistic feeling with which the figure has been observed. [34]

Spencer Bower's economical treatment stemmed partly from her knowledge of Japanese art.[35] The handling of the figure in the Getting About series is similar to the Japanese figurative style in the decorative stylised drapery as well as the exaggerated stance and contorted head and feet, which are emphasised through linear outline and an absence of shadows. The simplified flattened form is constructed on an equal plane to the surrounding colour mass. This work differs from the Holm version where Spencer Bower employs tonal gradation through colour to suggest spatial recession.

In the Getting About in the Holm Collection the monumental figure dominates the picture space. The turquoise and pink colours of the woman's garments contradict the apparent heaviness of her aging body. Only the weightiness of her purple shoes hold her firmly on the ground, or rather, impedes her progress. However, the elderly woman is placed in a non-naturalistic setting. The bright yellow colour radiates warmth around her. In contrast to the other two works in this series Spencer Bower depicted her in a hat trimmed with flowers. Her action in clutching onto her handbag is represented again and her hands are hidden. Attention is focused on to the movement of her feet. The imagery is ambiguous because the presence of the distant horizon contradicts the idea contained in the title that the woman is simply "getting about". It suggests that she is undertaking a major journey, not a simple daily walk. The colour intimates it is a spiritual journey.

On the other hand, the vast space between the woman and the distant horizon

may be a projection of her conception of distance on a shorter journey. In this reading, the viewer enters into her subjective experience. Janet Frame has described the feelings and fears experienced by an elderly physically frail woman in "The Bath", set in Dunedin in the early spring:

> She wondered how long ago it was since she was able to look up at the sky without reeling with dizziness. Now she did not dare look up. There was enough to attend to down and around - the cracks and hollows in the footpath, the patches of frost and ice and the potholes in the roads; the approaching cars and motorcycles; and now, after all the outside menaces, the inner menace of her own body. She had to be guardian now over her arms and legs, force them to do as she wanted when how easily and dutifully they had walked, moved and grasped, in the old days! They were the enemy now. It had been her body that showed treachery when she tried to get out of the bath. If she ever wanted to bath again - how strange it seemed! - she would have to ask another human being to help her guard and control her own body. Was this so fearful? she wondered. Even if it were not, it seemed so.[36]

Differing interpretations of the image of an elderly woman walking with the aid of a stick can be found in popular photographs and prints. William Nicholson's print caricaturing Queen Victoria is one example.[37] Norman Parkinson's photograph of "The Old Lady of Bath" demonstrates how accurately Spencer Bower has captured the stance and shape of the heavy but frail human form in motion and how she has, in addition, translated the image into a wider expression of human experience and feeling.[38]

The Getting About in the Holm Collection was likened to Gauguin's Pacific Island style by a reviewer when it was shown in the 1977-79 touring Retrospective exhibition.[39] Spencer Bower had seen the work of Gauguin and other Post-impressionists at first hand during her tour of Europe. She travelled to Russia especially to see the collections of French Post-impressionist art, which had recently become accessible to foreign tourists.[40] In the Leningrad and the Pushkin Museum in Moscow she would have seen major works by Matisse, Cezanne and Picasso. Her notebooks and clippings from the 1950s to

the 1970s indicate her interest in these artists. She also visited major galleries in other European cities. However at this stage of her career Gauguin was more likely to provide inspiration than directly influence her works.

Colour is the dominating feature of the third painting entitled Getting About, c.1969 [fig. 34]. [41] A vibrant pink hue has been applied unevenly over the entire picture surface. The acrylic paint has been variously brushed on and scratched so that in places the white ground shows through in a zigzag pattern. A yellow wash applied in angled patterns defines a white intersecting pathway through which the figure appears to walk. The expressive brushstrokes form a lively surface movement . The high-keyed colour is used dramatically to heighten and intensify the emotive mood and atmosphere suggested by the subject matter.

The image differs from the previous works because her feet and legs are hidden under a voluminous robe. Unlike the other two works on this theme, an interior setting is suggested by the robe and the patterned square covering the lower left area. Tension has been created compositionally through the intersection of the figure with the right angles of the carpet square, which is decorated with a black zigzag line on the edge which runs diagonally upwards from the base to cross the central axis. The other edge of the carpet square is patterned with three black parallel lines. The head and shoulders of the figure also intersect with the smaller, secondary angular shape in the top right corner. Compositionally, this provides structural balance as it repeats the carpet shape. It is an abstract element and appears to hold the woman in a confined space. It also draws the eye to the focal point of the painting, the woman's head and shoulders. Where the outer lines meet her upper arms and shoulders they accentuate the exaggerated dimensions of her taut broad shoulders and arms.

The illusion of solidity of the woman's heavy body and broad shoulders is created partly by the the contrasting insubstantiality of her wooden crutches, which are merely suggested by fine black lines. The crutch clearly visible on the right side of her body tapers to an acute point. It has a knife edged sharpness. This triangular shape is echoed in the lines of the folds of the black towel slung over her shoulder and the hemline of her gown. It is also found in the adjacent zigzag carpet pattern. The head is similarly abruptly and economically represented, by a stroke of bright blue paint. The neat, half-moon shaped head is rendered even smaller by being juxtaposed with a black shawl. This weighs her down as her body leans to that side. Black is an ominous choice of colour. The bulky robe accentuates the woman's size, so that she has a dignified, imperious appearance, particularly if compared to the former "Getting About" subjects. It is this, in combination with the angular lines and the unusual high-keyed colour treatment, that creates an atmosphere of tension. The woman embodies power through her physical appearance and her act of walking away in defiance.

While the decorative use of colour and line may have been inspired by Matisse or Dufy, the technique and imagery shows Spencer Bower's ability to translate her personal experiences into works which express common truths. It is supported by Rebecca West's claim that:

> domesticity is essentially drama, for drama is conflict and the home compels conflict by its concentration of active personalities in a small area. The real objection to domesticity is that it is too exciting.[42]

In *New Zealand Painting since 1960* Peter Cape interpreted the subject of this work as:

> an attitude,...of doggedness and determination....Although this painting, and a number like it from the same period, is not technically a portrait, it does represent the strong feelings the artist had about her elderly mother. There is immense determination in the set of the

> shoulders under the bathrobe and in the thrust of the body against the crutches, but the treatment is anything but sentimental. [43]

This interpretation emphasises the subjective, autobiographical aspect of this work. He did not define what these strong feelings were, nor the circumstances that gave rise to the works. This may have led to a greater understanding of the situation of contempary women artists combining artistic and domestic careers. He has downplayed the general application of the series. Spencer Bower avoided any specific identity of the subject in the titles and the imagery, so that she represents the experiences of a broad category of people. In a general sense these works express human frailty and the strong determination of women to remain independent whilst struggling to overcome the physical and psychological effects of aging.

Spencer Bower completed her series of paintings with a portrait of her mother seated at a table. The acrylic painting, Untitled (Rosa Spencer Bower), [fig.35] was probably painted at the time the "Getting About" series was produced, although it has not been exhibited.[44] The work cannot be described as a portrait in the conventional sense. It is quite unlike Spencer Bower's usual portraits including those already discussed in this chapter. It represents the combination of stylistic elements derived from Cezanne and the cubists.

Rosa Spencer Bower is shown seated at the far end of a rectangle dining table having a simple meal. In contrast to the previous acrylic works, she is seated formally in a central frontal position. A table napkin rests on her chest, indicating her old age. Arranged on the table in front of her are two plates and cups, a jug and a bread platter. The unseen presence of the artist is felt in this scene, as the second plate and cup are probably hers. It reminds us of Spencer Bower's dual position during the 1950s as a painter and as her mother's nurse and housekeeper. Rosa's crutches are placed against the sides of her

high-backed wooden chair as a tangible indicator of her dependence on her daughter. Painted the same golden shade as the table and depicted symbolically rather than realistically, they form an integral part of the composition and imagery.

The portrait combines a cubist frontalising of planes forming a pyramidal shape, with rich, sonorous Byzantine colour. The vertical structure is based on a series of rectangular colour planes. With its vibrant golden yellow colour the central table dominates the picture. The vertical emphasis in this painting is unusual as Spencer Bower's compositions tend to be constructed on dominant diagonal lines and a rhythmic inner movement. This diagonal emphasis can be seen in the works previously discussed. This work is reminiscent of Cezanne's Woman with a Coffee Pot ,[45] 1890-4, in its handling of spatial relationships and volumes as well as aspects of the composition and imagery. Each object on the table is arranged to draw the eye upwards over the table napkin and her face to the pair of crutches before returning to the upright jug and the loaf of bread, which sits on a platter precariously balanced on the table edge. Each element and object appear symbolic of the subject's moribund age and infirmity and of her dependency.

Jacqueline Fahey also examines the relationship and the familial roles of an aging mother and her daughter in her double portrait In Memoriam, 1969, suggesting their lack of communication through pose and placement within a central divided composition.[46] Each is introspectively locked into their private thoughts. Within the layers of meaning found in her imagery she expresses ideas which may be related to Spencer Bower's thematic approach, moving from the specific domestic situation to the universal issue of the inevitable cycle of life and death.

In his selection of contemporary paintings of elderly people Cape also included Robin White's portrait of her mother, Florence and Harbour Cone, 1974, in his discussion emphasising the personal feelings which she had projected into the work.[47] Florence and Harbour Cone and Robin White's explanation of the painting was first published in *Islands* in 1974, in an article, "Nineteen Painters: Their Favourite Works", to which Spencer Bower and two other female artists, Jacqueline Fahey and Helen Rockel, also contributed. Spencer Bower's response, expressed in a letter to *Islands* editor, Robin Dudding, shows that she sympathised with the ideas expressed by White and Fahey. She may have singled them out at this time because they too were examining the private, domestic lives of women and familial relationships through their art. She wrote:

> I very much liked Jackie Fahey and Robin White's work, which interests me. It makes me think that, given a few more women critics and women's work might be better appreciated. This isn't "lib", it's to do with something deeper, it's to do with understanding in a rather subtle way. "Viva la difference". [48]

This letter also examples the reaction of many women who felt they had to qualify their indentification with feminist aspirations and theories, because of media portrayals of feminists as 'homebreakers'.[49] While she was not a radical feminist herself, nor a feminist artist (in the sense that her work was not overtly political or polemical), her figurative work of the last two decades of her life was primarily concerned with aspects of women's lives which had been largely ignored by the the traditional mainstream art establishment. She sympathised with feminist ideas and was concious of them when she painted this series. As Rachel McAlpine has expressed it:

> Once you get sensitised to feminism, there's no way you can eradicate that. It stays there and grows. You don't have to shout about it all the time. I think this sensitivity to male attitudes is a good thing. I mean it's excrutiating having to go on and on saying these things, especially when people start thinking you might be a quite nice person

after all.[50]

Women were not numbered among the critics who reviewed the exhibitions which included The Literates and the "Getting About" series. It was still a male field in 1970. Cape and Moffitt offered the only extended comments. However these works, with the exception of the Getting About in the Best Collection, were exhibited on a number of occasions during the 1970s and have received favourable mentions. The appeal of the works can be related to the ideas they convey, because they were all purchased or selected by women. Spencer Bower painted these at a time when a much younger generation of artists, dominantly male, was assuming prominence in the local art world. The generation gap was felt in the arts, as elsewhere, during the fifties and sixties. The rapid shifts in international artistic styles and ideas was felt by Spencer Bower on her overseas trip. On her return she said she had been years behind.[51] Her response can be seen in this series.

Changes in social attitudes have been slower. More women now write and paint about their lives and personal relationships.[52] In 1980 it still took courage to paint about family relationships, and to make this publically known, as Bridie Lonie observed in the *Mothers* exhibition catalogue.[53] She was unaware of Spencer Bower's works.

The formal aspects of the works examined in this chapter indicate developments that took place between 1950 and 1970 in Spencer Bower's approach to figurative painting and portraiture. The early studies are fundamentally differentiated from the later paintings by their naturalism and technically by the change in medium, as she began to use acrylic paints in preference to oils when they became commercially available in New Zealand in 1966, adapting her watercolour techniques to new symbolic, expressive purposes. The

developments in her thematic approach have been related to the changes in her personal circumstances because these are central to an understanding of her interpretation of women growing old as a psychological study of her attitudes and feelings of sympathetic understanding and ambivalence.

ENDNOTES

1. Rosa and Olivia Spencer Bower had left their home at Claxby to settle in the Christchurch house early in 1942, when Olivia's twin brother Marmaduke was married. Spencer Bower moved to Auckland early in 1943. Throughout the years up north she was urged by her brother to return to Christchurch to care for her ailing mother.

2. Two works were exhibited during this time. The changes in her pattern of working are indicated in the Group Show exhibits. In the early fifties she was regularly exhibiting portraits in oils (of women and children) as well as the Queenstown landscapes. In 1955 the exhibition of her first, and probably only large scale landscape in oils, The Changing River, and its pendant in watercolour, Bleached Terraces, suggests that she was working and experimenting with studio works, a practical resolution to her situation which also expanded her media range. From 1956 the exhibits were mainly watercolour and mixed media landscapes. In 1958 the Group Show reviewer said her watercolour exhibits were "the finest she has produced...This is watercolour painting somewhere near its best". (J.N.K.,*The Press*, 14 Oct. 1958.) At the same time, in 1957, she told Peter Webb she could not produce works for a show at his new Argus Dealer Gallery because of her nursing duties.

3. Paul Stamberger, Letter to Olivia Spencer Bower, 1 March 1955, - Olivia Spencer Bower Papers, Claxby.

4. Letter draft, Olivia Spencer Bower Papers, McDougall Gallery archives. In her first draft she had written: "As I have been unable to paint seriously for the last eight or nine years owing to housekeeping and nursing duties my wish to do so has become very overwhelming and it seems that my talents will be entirely wasted unless I make a bid for freedom to do so...."

5. In a broader context this situation illustrates the situation of women in modern capitalist society, because it is grounded in a contradictory ideology which propounds to offer women equality of opportunity with men, while devaluing the primary female gender role of unpaid domestic workers and nurturers. In New Zealand these attitudes and beliefs have been enshrined at national level: "The state's ideology of the family has largely remained that of the traditional family structure and responsibility: the male breadwinner, children cared for at home, married women at home, greater priority to the old than the young. Thus New Zealand government policies for the family have largely provided opportunities to reinforce traditional structures which promote the dominance of men over women, parents over children, and the old over the young". Peggy G. Koopman-Boyden and Claudia P. Scott, "Family Policy: The Challenge of Diversity," Paper presented to the New Zealand Sociology Assn. Conference, Auckland, May 1983, pp. 13-14.

6. Elizabeth Eastmond, "Jacqueline Fahey: Artist and Self-Image," *Art New Zealand*, No. 42 (1987), p. 56.

7. Ibid.

8. Rosa Spencer Bower, Watercolour and charcoal, not signed or dated, 382 x 560mm, Collection of the National Art Gallery, Wellington.

9. Untitled (Rosa Spencer Bower sleeping), Watercolour, not signed or dated, 340 x 488mm, Collection of the Olivia Spencer Bower Foundation, Christchurch.

10. Woman Reading, c. 1955, Watercolour, signed lower left, 370 x 485mm, Batten Collection, Auckland.

11. An example is Portrait of a Man, 1976, Watercolour, signed lower right, 744 x 538mm, Private Collection, Christchurch.

12. Bill Pearson, "Fretful Sleepers," in *Landfall Country*, ed. Charles Brasch, Christchurch, 1962.

13. Tamar Garb, *Women Impressionists*, Oxford, 1986, p. 60.

14. Frances Hodgkins, Flowers and a Cat, 1941, Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

15. Ursula Bethell, *From a Garden in the Antipodes*, London, 1929, p. 54. Published under the pseud. Evelyn Hayes.

16. The work previously cited.

17. Three Seated Women, Watercolour, signed lower right, 197 x 397mm, Collection of the Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt.

18. Untitled (Three Women Reading), Watercolour, signed lower right, 193 x 432mm, Collection of the Olivia Spencer Bower Foundation, Christchurch.

19. The Literates, c. 1966, Oil on board, unsigned, 590 x 695 mm., Holland Collection, Christchurch.

20. This painting is listed in the *Olivia Spencer Bower Retrospective* catalogue, 1977, as The Readers.

21. Vincent O'Sullivan, intro. *The Oxford Book of New Zealand Writing Since 1945*, ed. MacDonald P. Jackson and Vincent O'Sullivan, Auckland, 1983, p. xxxv.

22. Rosa Spencer Bower, c. 1955, Watercolour, signed lower left, 506 x 403mm, Collection of the Olivia Spencer Bower Foundation, Christchurch.

23. The best known example is Tussock Country, 1957, Watercolour, 762 x 533 mm, Collection of the Auckland City Art Gallery. Reproduced in: Gil Docking, *Two Hundred Years of New Zealand Painting*, Wellington, 1971, p. 162.

24. Olivia's Mother, c. 1955, Mixed media, signed lower right, 405 x 505mm. image, Collection of the Olivia Spencer Bower Foundation.

25. Berthe Morisot, The Sisters, 1869, Oil on canvas, 521 x 813mm, Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art, Reproduced in: *Women Artists: 1550-1950*. ed. Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, Los Angeles Museum of Art, 1976, p. 232.

26. Julie King, "Henriette Browne and La Lecture de la Bible," *Robert McDougall Art Gallery Bulletin*, No. 2 (May-June 1982) Supplement, p. 1. Reproduction: Henriette Brown, La Lecture de la Bible, 1857, Oil, McDougall Art Gallery. Although Spencer Bower is not directly influenced by Browne's work in this instance she may have recalled it when she painted Reading, 1974, Watercolour, 720 x 478mm, Collection of the Ashburton Public Library. This painting of a woman reading has a Victorian mood.

27. Louise Lewis, Untitled, 1974, Acrylic on board, 920 x 110 mm, Victoria University, Wellington. Reproduced: Anne Kirker, *New Zealand Women Artists*, Auckland, 1986, p. 191.

28. Jacqueline Fahey, Sisters Communing, Oil on board, 1102 x 921mm, Hocken Library, University of Otago, Dunedin. Reproduced: Kirker, p. 133.

29. Alison Mitchell, *Olivia Spencer Bower Retrospective* catalogue, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch, 1977, n. pag. (ref. cat. no. 63.) This drawing has not been traced. Reproduced: "Discoveries", *C.S.A. News*, No. 49, May/June, 1973,

30. Getting About, c. 1969, Acrylic on board, signed lower right, 530 x 430mm, Best Collection, Christchurch.

31. Getting About, 1969, Acrylic on board, signed lower left, 746 x 610mm, Holm Collection, Christchurch.

32. Springtime, c. 1969, Acrylic on board, not traced. In this work the subject faces the viewer. She is placed in the foreground of a yellow garden and is dressed in a bright red garment. This can be seen in a photograph taken by Spencer Bower at the Group Show.

33. Getting About No.3, c. 1970, Acrylic on board, signed lower left, 755 x 700mm, Archdall Collection, Christchurch

34. Trevor Moffitt, *The Christchurch Press*, 4 November, 1970.

35. Spencer Bower's interest in and study of Japanese prints was remarked on by Evelyn Page in discussion with me on October 1, 1987.

36. Janet Frame, "The Bath", in Jackson and O'Sullivan, p. 395.

37. William Nicholson, Queen Victoria, 1897. Reproduced: Frances Spalding, *British Art Since 1900*, London, 1986, p. 10.

38. Norman Parkinson, "The Old Lady of Bath", in *Fifty Years of Fashion, New York*, p. 39.

39. N.B., "Olivia Spencer Bower at the G.B.A.G: 'A lifetime of painting'", *New Plymouth Sunday Express*, 24 September 1978.

40. "She sketched and painted her way around the world", *Hawkes Bay Herald Tribune*, Hastings, 23 Nov. 1965.

41. Archdall Collection.

42. Quoted by Mhairi Erber, "Ghostly offerings from 'Caterwaul'," rev. of *The Virago Book of Ghost Stories*, ed. Richard Dalby, *The Christchurch Press*, 14 May 1988, p. 26.

43. Peter Cape, *New Zealand Painting Since 1960*, Auckland, 1979, p. 70. The reproduction of this Spencer Bower painting in Cape is inaccurate as it shows blue tones which have never been present in the work.

44. Rosa Spencer Bower, c. 1970, acrylic on board, unsigned, 760 x 505mm, Collection of the Olivia Spencer Bower Foundation, Christchurch.

45. Paul Cezanne, The Woman with a Coffee Pot, 1890-4, Oil, Louvre, Paris.

46. Jacqueline Fahey, In Memoriam, 1969, Oil on board, 976 x 595mm, Sampson Collection, Auckland.

47. Cape. op. cit.

48. Olivia Spencer Bower, copy of letter to Robin Dudding, "Notebook 1970-76", Olivia Spencer Bower Papers, McDougall.

49. Juliet Batten, "New Zealand Feminist Artists," in *Broadsheet*, 110 (1983), p. 20.

50. "Rachel McAlpine," in *Talking About Ourselves: Twelve New Zealand Poets in Conversation with Harry Ricketts*, Wellington, 1986, p. 40.

51. "When I returned again to Europe I found my thinking was away behind the times." Olivia Spencer Bower, "An Artist Speaks", *C.S.A. News*, No. 22, November 1968.

52. Katie Pickles, rev. of *Public and Private Worlds - Women in Contemporary New Zealand*, ed. Shelagh Cox, *Canta*, 58, No. 17 (1988), p. 38.

53. "Most women artists have not used their work as subject matter where that use might alter or damage the relationships they maintain with their families. Many women artists feel that art is an option out of the family role, and therefore don't want to mix the two. Others have had to remain single, or childless, in order to remain artists, or have had to leave their families. The overly subjective has been avoided as material for public art, and this has prevented the recognition of a common problem as subject matter. To leave one's family is still socially unacceptable; the need to express first the problems of this, and then the solutions, still falls victim to the reticence instilled by social pressure. Within feminist art circles the pressures

are reversed: because motherhood has prevented artistic self-realisation it is difficult to celebrate motherhood. Women's relationships with their own mothers are subject to similar difficulties. It requires a strong stomach to state and deal with the tensions inevitable in the relationship: the mother/daughter aspects become slightly reversed as the daughter grows older. Robin White's (other) portraits of her mother and a gentle pencil drawing of Edith Collier's, [Sargeant Gallery], are, outside the works in this exhibition, the only examples I could find. There must be others." Bridget Lonie, "The subject of motherhood as treated in New Zealand painting", *Mothers* , The Women's Gallery Exhibition Catalogue, Wellington, 1980, pp. 6-7.

III

THE SPINNERS SERIES

In her contribution to the 1974 *Islands* article, Spencer Bower outlined her recent work, citing her "interest in movement and balance" as the factor which linked together "seemingly quite different paintings":

> There has been recently, a dancing series, a 'getting about' series, a spinning series; the last balancing on the point of contact of the hands, between the spinners and their wheels; the characters of these people somewhat subdued in the involvement with what they are doing. With the dancing the figure will eventually go to another part of the picture. So what does that do to the balance?
>
> The emotions are all involved, rather private, nothing pushed, because the whole picture may be concerned with thinking, loving and living with an optimistic slant, and having that optimistic outlook, I hope, sometimes, with a touch of wit.

In this statement Spencer Bower provides an insight into her personal philosophy, which underlies and characterises her work. This chapter concentrates on the studies of women spinning.

The 'Spinners' series is the most extensive and significant group of figurative paintings in Spencer Bower's career. Approximately thirty-five paintings on this theme were exhibited between 1959 and 1980. The series evolved during the 1960s and continued into the 1970s, the period when spinning was revived as a popular craft activity practised predominantly by women. The most intensive period for the production of the Spinners works was in the years between 1966 and 1971. These works are mainly large acrylic paintings. Spencer Bower adopted a rarely utilised source of subject matter and transformed it into works treated with imaginative originality and insight. The complexity of the spinning paintings contrasted with Spencer Bower's later watercolour landscape paintings in which she sought to reduce the elements of the subject to the barest essentials.

This chapter will outline the circumstances which led to the production of the series of drawings and paintings of women spinners, relating this to the revival of the craft of spinning in New Zealand during World War II and again in the 1960s. Brief mention will also be made of the significance of spinning as a woman's occupation and craft throughout history. An examination of selected works will follow. As Spencer Bower rarely dated her works it has not been possible to assess individual works in order of their development. In conclusion, the reception of exhibited works is discussed. This has indicated the high estimation held of the Spinning series by critics familiar with her work.

The Spinners paintings portray women occupied in handspinning wool on the traditional wooden treadle spinning wheel. The figure groups vary from a solitary spinner to ten figures arranged around a spinning circle, or spinning 'bee'. Following her usual practice Spencer Bower began with conventional means of description before translating her ideas into a semi-abstract mode. Significant stylistic features of these works include their veils of colour, the predominance of circular shapes and the textural variety obtained in both oil and acrylic mediums.

The series "is about people, their relationship to each other and their world, and about the problems of composition."[1] The women subjects are generally featureless, their anonymity expressing the private nature of their lives and creative activity. In the majority of the works they are shown in abstracted settings. The focal points of the compositions are the abstracted circular shapes of the drive wheels and the spinner's forms, particularly their active hands; in combination hands and wheels form the

essential link in this activity between machine and worker and both are constantly in motion. This sense of continuous rhythmic movement is repeated throughout the compositions and is particularly evident in the larger figure groups. However, Spencer Bower has also conveyed a sense of stasis, of immobility and permanence in the imagery through the semi-abstracted monumentalised figures of the women. Each exists in their own space and retains some individual characteristic, expressed through pose, form and colour. The overall effect is to suggest an air of timelessness and universality. The spinners are enigmatic, mysterious women existing in an unrealistic, imaginary world. The artist has achieved this by transforming them and their actual physical location, either a domestic environment in Christchurch or at Enys in the Canterbury high country, near Castle Hill.

Spencer Bower's approach suggests that she was aware of the historical significance of spinning and its symbolic association with women. As an activity practised continuously and almost exclusively by women since the beginning of human civilisation, spinning is imbedded in the language, history, myth and legend of every civilisation and culture. The spinning wheel was invented in India about one thousand years ago and introduced into Europe in the thirteenth century; its use was universal in Europe and Britain until 1764, when the invention of the spinning jenny heralded the mechanisation of spinning fibres and the end of a major female cottage industry and source of women's economic independence.[2] The earliest evidence of the use of handspindles date back to the Stone Age; wherever traces of early civilisations have been found, so has evidence of spinning activity. Ancient Egyptian handspinners were depicted in many drawings and paintings.[3] Depictions of women at work handspinning with distaff and spindle may have reached its apex in Ancient Greece. It was a popular

illustration on vases because it was the major domestic occupation of Greek women [Fig.36].[4] Handspinning and weaving became glorified and canonised as the symbol of female virtues of industry and submissiveness throughout the ancient Mediterranean world. In Greek culture particularly, this association was "deeply imbedded in the religious-mythological thinking of the age and in men's consciousness of women."[5] This ideology continued in Roman culture and early Christian religious thought and art. The Virgin Mary was represented as an industrious spinner [Fig.37].[6]

Through her classical education, Spencer Bower was probably aware of spinning's association with individual women in classical myth and legend, such as Athena, Greek goddess of spinning and weaving, and with the three female Fates, the *Moirai*, who "allotted, spun and snipped the very threads of men's lives." [7] Since the division of fine art and craft activities in the Renaissance, the craft of spinning has not been a popular painting subject, probably because of its traditional association with female domestic life rather than with the heroic activities of men. The best known painting of women spinning is probably Velazquez's The Tapestry Weavers or The Fable of Arachne, 1657? [Fig.38].[8] Like Velazquez Spencer Bower uses contemporary spinners as models but invests her work with sufficient ambiguity so that it is never clear whether the subjects represent spinners from the mythical past or the present.

Spencer Bower's thoughts on the theme were expressed in her article "Discoveries" in 1973:

> Groups of people fascinate me. People stand differently when with others and for one instant a strange force may be there or a gentle rhythm has arrived.....The gentle rhythm of spinning has its own appeal. It also brings people together. There are also many approaches to the subject matter. The rhythm itself can become the subject matter. Then the individuality of the wheels and their users

> provide an incentive. For there are short people with little wheels on stubby legs and other people with entirely different movements come with their cathedral-like edifices. One problem is the space taken on the ground by chair, person, wheel and wool container which once again separates the people into their own world. The environment itself can be an incentive. I can remember my friend spinning in the mountains and hills. Tussocks and spinners become a thought.[9]

Spencer Bower exhibited her first painting on the theme of spinning, Spinning Rhythm, in the 1959 Group Show. It has not been possible to identify this painting . The starting point for the series was Spencer Bower's friendship with Minta Brittan and a small group ofChristchurch women who met together to talk and spin. Other friends who appear in these works include Dorothy Anderson, Ecka Westmacott and Marjorie Edgar-Jones. Minta Brittan was one of many New Zealand women who took up spinning during the Second World War in response to the demand for woollen garments for men fighting overseas. Because of the war-time rationing of wool for domestic use, there was no surplus yarn available for women to knit for the troops and for personal use. This led to the revival of handspinning at this time. Most of the spinning wheels used were manufactured locally in response to the demand. Walter Ashford, a woodwork manufacturer in Ashburton, was asked to produce a kitset spinning wheel which could be posted throughout New Zealand and assembled by women. He has observed that:

> there is little documented evidence to show that spinning was common in this country [before the war]. However, early immigrants did bring a few spinning wheels but they were few and far between. The wheels that I saw were fragile, complicated, ornamental and very hard to find.[10]

He points out that during the war women were also operating the factory machines for the first time.[11] Despite the widespread mobilisation of women into organised spinning bees and their contribution to the war effort, it is difficult to find mention of this in published accounts of New Zealand history.

Minta Brittan participated in a spinning group held regularly at Bishopcourt. After the need for woollen garments for men serving in the navy was fulfilled, this group of voluntary workers continued to produce yarn and knitted goods for distribution by churches in London until it disbanded after the war, like most of the organised spinning groups. Brittan also started a second, smaller spinning bee at her home. Both groups co-existed for a time, and the group at the Brittan home continued to meet together until her death in 1974. It was this group that Spencer Bower joined, as an observer rather than a participant in the spinning activity. Minta Brittan's son Dick believes that Spencer Bower may have done some spinning herself during the 1950s at her home in Memorial Avenue. He recalls seeing spinning wheels there,[12] and a small drawing by Spencer Bower shows Rosa Spencer Bower spinning.[13] Photographs taken at Spencer Bower's Leinster Road home in 1970 show a spinning group also meeting there [Figs.39 & 40]. Another group has operated at Claxby for many years, so that Spencer Bower had many opportunities to observe spinners at work. The women appearing together in her works often are members of different spinning bees, brought together in composite paintings. Many of Spencer Bower's spinning paintings are set in the Brittan home in Gordon Avenue, where the group met from 1958. They can be identified by the chaise longue often included as an element of the design.

A second location, at Enys, provided the departure point for spinning paintings set in the natural environment. These show women spinning outdoors rather than in the usual domestic environment. In both the indoor and outdoor drawings and paintings Spencer Bower extracted the essential features of the environment to include in the composition. The works showing women spinning at Enys held special significance for Spencer

Bower. They were developed to incorporate her favourite tussock country landscape into works peopled by personal friends. Most works in the spinning series have two levels of reference; the private and autobiographical level holding the artist's personal memories and subjective feelings and the general level expressing the shared human experience of the imaginative world of myth and fantasy. Spencer Bower has left an explanation of one such work, The Happy Spinners,[14] c. 1967: "it has rememberences of friends who spin, tussock country which is much loved & so has about it something akin to folk story "[Fig.41].[15]

Spencer Bower's association with the high country landscape around Enys extended back to her early years in New Zealand, which was a time of major adjustment for her:

> I was trying to discover New Zealand. After having been brought up in such a habitated country as England, I was trying through my painting to find out how to cope with such a different environment. There was very little precedent or help to find a way to understand the country. I longed to do people in the surroundings. New Zealand is so without people.[16]

The paintings of spinners in the hill country landscape achieved this aim. In her first paintings at Enys, watercolours done in the 1920s, she concentrated on the mountain views in the conventional manner of her teachers and contemporaries. She expressed her response to the Castle Hill environment in a letter to her mother from Enys in May 1929: "There is some snow on the mountains but not a great deal. The rocks are *most* exciting but I am doing the mountains in preference to rocks as they are bound to look better this time of year than in the summer."[17] In the later spinning paintings, such as The Happy Spinners, c. 1967, or Spinning,[18] 1968 [Fig.66], it is the rocky limestone outcrops which earlier excited her artistic imagination that provide the setting for the figures of spinners. Her interest in depicting the rounded and elliptical forms of the spinning wheels was also found in earlier

series such as the Rawene paintings of fishing nets, the Suffolk cartwheels of 1965 and in works such as Grindstones, Queenstown in the Queenstown series of the early fifties [Fig.42].[19]

During the fifties and sixties Spencer Bower renewed her acquaintance with Enys. She often accompanied the Brittan family or Minta Brittan and four or five women friends to weekend sojourns or longer holidays at Enys, where in 1950 the Brittan family had built a small holiday cottage on the site of the original Castle Hill homestead of the Enys brothers, Trelissick. The cottage, sheathed in corrugated iron and painted green, is a familiar feature of many of Spencer Bower's paintings of Enys. The locality was a popular source of subject-matter for her landscape paintings in the 1950s and 1960s. These works incorporating the Castle Hill mountains and beech forest range from intimate close up views of the cottage surroundings to dramatic vistas of the mountains. Spencer Bower's attachment to Enys and the people she stayed with there is also expressed in works showing the Brittan family or friends relaxing outdoors by the cottage. These holidays were a source of respite for Spencer Bower during the fifties when she was preoccupied with caring for her mother. She would walk or paint outdoors, or observe and sketch the women spinning on the wheels they took with them on holiday.

Spencer Bower's memories of Enys encompass her visit there in the 1920 to the later holidays with friends. In this recollection she expresses the excitement she held for the isolated natural environment and lifestyle at Enys:

> I used to go there when the Poulton's had it. Castle Hill is that farm with red roofs which is built at the foot of the Castle Hill Rocks...you go past a cutting till you come to Enys - nobody much knows it's there. It's a marvelous place to walk from. It's on the way to all the ski places up there. I stayed there so much. I used to go there weekend after weekend. I used to paint in the snow and all weather. The best paintings were done when I stayed there longer. During the weekends there were more people there and I couldn't work so well. It was a marvelous place....The secret

> underground river is most exciting to go through, you have to go with torches. Its terrifying. When the wind blows, you can't get to paint the hills in tone, its just moving in waves on the tussock. I think I haven't got a lot of paintings from Enys because we were always doing something.[20]

The evolution of her realistic paintings of people relaxing at Enys to the imaginative paintings of spinners can be traced in a number of examples. A watercolour, Holiday Time, c. 1966, shows Brittan and Dorothy Anderson reading outdoors near the cottage on a summer day.[21] The two women, shielded from the sun and heat by large sunhats, are casually seated one behind the other. This approach recalls The Literates, c. 1966, where Spencer Bower explored the idea of women readers becoming isolated into self-absorbed worlds, while spatially they occupy the same intimate environment. The pleasant outdoor Enys environment is different to the claustrophobic atmosphere of The Literates interior setting. A relaxed mood of quietude and self-absorption is also expressed in other paintings of people reading and relaxing at Enys. It is also found in the works incorporating spinners, such as the acrylic painting, Minta and Dorothy at Enys, 1967 [Fig.43].[22] Minta Brittan is placed in the background in this work, absorbed in spinning in the sunshine, while Dorothy Anderson leans back in a deckchair reading and casually resting her feet against the cottage wall. The two women, viewed in profile, are unified within the composition by a rhythmic movement flowing through their forms and the spinning wheel. The rounded natural contours of the women's bodies hunched in concentration contrast with the angular structured outlines of made objects: their seats, the building and the flyer assembly of the spinning wheel.

Another contrast demonstrates the artist's interest in observing the way in which individuals and their working implements assume similarities of form and character, in this instance between the shapes created by the different

postures of the two women, whose bodies form the central horizontal/vertical division of the composition. Spencer Bower has exaggerated the similarities between the upright vertical forms of Brittan and the wheel she is working, and between the curving outline of Anderson's body and the diagonal shape of the deckchair. The women are also differentiated by the colour of their garments. Spencer Bower may have wanted to emphasize differences in mood as well as attitude between the woman relaxing and the woman at work. The composition has been constructed so that every line within it is echoed or inverted, providing balance, harmony and constant movement. For instance, the shape and tone of the puddle of water in the right foreground is echoed in each woman's head.

The subdued colour harmonies of green and ochre with accents of pink and blue contribute to the relaxed mood, giving the scene a light, airy feeling. The colours are natural and descriptive in contrast to non-naturalistic Spinners works dating from this time where colour is used for expressive and symbolic purposes. In this work Spencer Bower continues her interest in capturing the effects of light on forms, using the brush rather than chiarascuro. The play of light on the corrugated iron cottage walls has a blurring and softening effect, so they become as texturally palpable as the cloth of Anderson's dress. The sunlight masks the faces and expressions of the two women. Brittan's head is left white while Anderson's shadowed face is denoted by a brushstroke. It is a studio painting utilising effects obtained with acrylic paints, such as the mottled patterns of the scumbled ochre colour that denote sun-parched earth and grass.

In another version of this work, the watercolour Summer's Day, c. 1972, the scene has been slightly extended in the foreground to incorporate a third

woman, also spinning, and the porch step [Fig.44].[23] This is also a composite studio composition constructed from sketches. The woman in the foreground is using a Saxony wheel, the most common type, although shown with the flyer assembly removed so that only the spindle remains. Brittan works a compact, upright parlour wheel. The wheels have been simplified and distorted as in all the Spinning works. The two vertical parts of the flyer assembly on Brittan's wheel, known as 'maidens', have been elongated to balance her form. Spencer Bower gives more definition to the women's hands holding an unseen thread than to their facial features. The constant rhythmic motion of hands and the wheel is felt in a wider sense, moving throughout the arrangement of the three figure units placed one above the other. Although the three women are linked together by the overlapping of forms, their preoccupation with their own activity expresses a mood of quiet solitude, perhaps capturing the atmosphere of Enys felt by Spencer Bower on these occasions. The soft misty colour effects and the closed background also contribute to this intimate mood. The treatment is poetic and lyrical, but by facing each women in a different direction so that they neither look or speak to each other, Spencer Bower suggests that each is locked into her own thoughts and so has an air of loneliness.

Spencer Bower had previously depicted women preoccupied in creative activities, but not spinning [Fig.45],[24] Paintings of women spinning are rare in New Zealand art. Esther Hope's watercolour painting of a solitary spinner provides an uncommon precedent to Spencer Bower's subject. The Spinner in the Sunporch.[Fig.46] was reproduced in the *Yearbook of the Arts* in 1946.[25] Hope was a friend of Spencer Bower's. In painting this work Hope drew on her own experiences and observations to represent a contemporary scene from everyday life. Women living on farms in rural areas took up spinning

during the war to supply their own needs for woollen yarns. The isolation of rural women's lives is expressed in this work. The woman is shown alone in a domestic interior against the backdrop of an unpeopled high country landscape. An empty chair next to her expresses absence.

The isolation of the individual even in a group situation was brought out by Spencer Bower in the spinning series. It reflected her own experiences of not fully belonging to or participating in the group activity. As an observer she remained on the periphery of the spinning group. By consciously seeking to express the loneliness of the individual spinner "isolated in their own world."[26] Spencer Bower was expressing her own feelings, while at the same time she drew on her observations and perceptions of other women's lives to show the nature of their existance. She used colour as a means of differentiating and isolating the individual. This is evident in the early spinning paintings.

In the oil Untitled (Two Spinners), [Fig.47] [27] c. 1967, two women are seated side by side spinning in an indefinable interior setting. One is dressed in pink and the other wears blue. They are portrayed as individual beings occupying their own space and thoughts because of their differences of shape and colour. These contrasts are extended to the objects around them, their chairs and spinning wheels. Spencer Bower may have had this work in mind when she described in "Discoveries" how the individual character of the spinner is reflected in their spinning wheel, so that the shapes and movements complement one another. The woman on the left forms a compact unit with her armchair and wheel. There is an aura of mystery about her because her form is only vaguely defined, in a manner akin to Henry Moore's drawings of female figures. Her head is tortoise-like small and

hairless so she looks like a spectre through the hazy atmosphere. The appearance of her elaborate Victorian parlour wheel is distorted so that the drive wheel and the treadle are viewed frontally. Their curvilinear outlines are echoed in the arm of her chair. The second woman also forms a self-contained unit with her seat and wheel. She is a short squat person using a small parlour wheel.[28] The rounded forms of her shoulders are echoed in the curves of the back of the low couch. The black accents of her hat and shoes emphasise these similarities of shape and size. Her legs are short and stubby like the legs of the wheel and the chaise longue. The woman and the chair are presented as a unified mass because they are both draped in a turquoise colour. In a similar sense the orange reflections of her spinning wheel are diffused over her form, perhaps to suggest her absorption in her work. A shadow falls on her face as it inclines downwards to her hands working the wool. It adds to the note of melancholy and resignation expressed in the attitude of her body. Spencer Bower noted difference in the figures rather than individuals. By isolating the women into their own space she made a cogent comment on their lives.

Despite their differences of appearance both women almost become absorbed into their surroundings, as if the artist is suggesting that the constant rhythmic motion of their spinning wheels induces a shared dreamlike state. This also comments on the invisibility of women whose lives and occupations are spent in the private sphere of domesticity. The close atmosphere and mood creates an aura of mystery and ambiguity about the two women and the intimate setting. This work is related in technique and imagery to The Literates. The women are placed in an enclosed interior setting, suggested by the chairs and dense mass of a wall behind them. Whereas in The Literates Spencer Bower emphasises the spatial and psychological void

between two women by seating them in the foreground on either side of an expressive cloud of paint, here she places the women within the centre of an indefinable space so that the haze of broken impasto paint permeates the atmosphere around and over them. An empty space between their chairs still separates the women and although it is not as pronounced as in The Literates, it emphasises their isolation.

Limited spatial recession is defined by four vertical colour planes. The lighter strip of violet and mauve on the right of the picture and the grey area on the left side open and extend the scene beyond the darker, central space where the women sit, and thus provides visual relief from its close atmosphere. Yet the sloping floor area and the strange forms on the left side belie a naturalistic reading of the setting. There is no certainty that this is set indoors; the chairs confuse and contradict with the sensation of sunlight and tree form on the left. The constant surface movement created by the short fluttering brushstrokes plays an essential part in establishing the mood and atmosphere. It suggests the rhythmic movement of the women's wheels and bodies as they work.

In The Happy Spinners, a rapid shift in mood occurs as the two spinners are conveyed to the open spaces of the Enys tussock country. Spencer Bower wanted to paint her friends "spinning in the most impossible place where they could never have got their spinning wheels." [29] Her familiarity with the Canterbury high country and her attachment to it is expressed through the lively surface pattern and the expansive design. The women's feelings of carefree happiness and companionship are shown in their gestures and dreamy smiles. Spencer Bower "worked with moveable template drawings" of the two figures to construct a composition which suggested the

constant "coming and going" movement between them as they spun.[30] The scene is opened out vertically by the cut-off gestures of their hands working the wool and the partial view of the woman and wheel on the right. The spinner's active movements express the rhythmic energy flowing through the design, seen in the undulating contours of the hills and clouds and the detailing of rocky outcrops. Even the jaunty hat worn by the woman in green expresses this. The dominating features are the spinning wheel in the centre foreground and the large sphere on the right. This was even more conspicuous before the painting was retouched in 1971, because it had bright orange paint dribbled down it. The circular shapes of these objects are repeated in the hill tops and cloud on the right side, whilst the diagonal lines of the spinning wheel legs set up a similar repetitive pattern on the left. Although the composition is carefully structured, there are no straight horizontal or vertical lines in it to suggest stasis, as there are in the two former works. It provides a pendant to (Two Spinners) by placing the two women in a opposite situation, so that the interior/exterior contrasts of mood and action can be seen in the design and imagery. In 1970 Christchurch reviewer John Oakley observed that "the lyrical quality of The Happy Spinners... makes this work a landmark in her artistic development".[31]

The high-keyed hues of the sky, the green dress and the foreground were toned down when Spencer Bower painted a translucent wash over these areas in 1971. She also added the two clouds on the left and so gains a more subtle effect. The changes now bring the spinner on the left into greater focus whereas formerly the turquoise sky drew attention away from the middle ground where she sits. This also increased the spatial recession so that the spinners seem further removed from civilisation. The figures and wheels were stylised to give them an air of childlike simplicity in keeping with

her conception of the work. By making visible the adjustments to the position of the spinner and wheel in the outlines of their forms Spencer Bower has increased the sensation of movement which is central to her theme.

Her description of this work as containing "something akin to folk story" [32] suggests that it was a formative work in the series. It indicates one direction she took in the Spinners series, lighter works with a 'touch of wit', which respond to the wide influence of Picasso and Matisse in that period. She only provided a general indication of the time when she painted The Happy Spinners but this places it shortly after her European trip when she began to use her figurative art more consciously as a vehicle for self-expression. At this time she introduced literary themes into her art. In 1966, the year after her return she exhibited works inspired by English folk themes, including Love Story, and Chichester Dancer.[33] These fanciful works depict medieval folk characters suspended in space, celebrating love and life. In mood and style they are similar to The Happy Spinners. She continued to produce occasional works in this vein, culminating in the 1977 lino print series of mystical lovers and angels.

Spencer Bower's idea to introduce an element of fable into her paintings of spinners is an explanation for her depiction of a group of women at work in the fantastical setting of a cave in Spinners No 1, c. 1967 [Fig.48]. [34] Caves have a complex range of associations and meanings that the artist could have drawn on. In addition, the spinners are connected to the distant past because the early spinners were cave dwellers.

This realistically improbable scene was possibly inspired by Spencer Bower's fascination with the limestone underground cave at Castle Hill, which she

described as "terrifying" in her reminiscences of Enys. By illuminating the scene with a cold white light and noting more detail the women and their spinning wheels are seen in greater clarity than in the interior setting of (Two Spinners). The two black shapes in the upper left background are openings into the inner recesses of the cave. They also give this setting the appearance of a dungeon cell. The double openings suggest that a labyrinth of dark passageways lie beyond. The swift underground stream that has formed the tunnel in the limestone rock at Castle Hill is represented, flowing down out of the inner cave along the left side of the picture. Swirls of mist cover the dark water. The women appear to be seated on rocks by the stream although the water and mist surround the feet of the two in the foreground. The spinning wheel on the left sits out over the edge, half suspended over the surface of the water. Access through the Castle Hill cave is by narrow rock ledges following the stream. Spencer Bower may have imagined her friends spinning in this situation. She has retained the claustrophic feeling of the low ceilings and narrow spaces inside the cave. She has also drawn on her experience of visiting the cave by transforming the tops of the two farthest spinning wheel maidens into candles. Torches are essential on the walk through the pitch black cave.

The candles casts an eerie glow over the looming distorted form of a woman spinning in the centre background. Her flattened head is unnaturally twisted sideways in the direction of her solid orange drive wheel. This is the only part of her spinning wheel depicted. Her intangible white form is blended into the grey gloom of the caves. It is also a shadow image of the woman in the foreground. By juxtaposing the candle-lit spinner with the smaller-scaled, naturalistic woman on her left Spencer Bower gave the former the appearance of an apparition, another indicator of the fantastic nature of the work. Another strange figure appears in the top right side in the guise of a woman

who seems to be dressed in a pink evening gown standing with her hands curved behind her back. Between these two can be seen the outline of another ghostly spinner lost in the shadows. At first she appears to be a cast shadow but her bright orange spinning drive wheel is clearly visible. This accentuates the contradictory spatial relationships in the work.

By comparison, the other spinners have a closer relationship to the real world. Spencer Bower used the subjects in Summer's Day for models, but she related them to a domestic setting by depicting them in aprons, often worn by spinners to protect their clothing from the greasy wool. The woman in the foreground also wears a simple black dress and plain apron. Her form has been monumentalised although her hands have been removed in another bizarre touch. Her features have been broadly delineated. Her dreamy, introspective gaze is reflected in the attitudes of the other women, but she stands out from them, not only because of her position in the foreground and her darker clothing but because she is gray haired and older. Her green chair is a symbolic reminder of the natural world outside the cave.

Spencer Bower gave the other three spinners a more youthful appearance, describing their garments in light pink and white shades with bright yellow and orange accents. Their generalised forms have been delineated with thick blue contour lines to suggest shadows formed in the half-lit cavern. Their lack of features is a consistent convention throughout this series, perhaps symbolising the spinners' loss of identity through their withdrawal into the world of dreams as they spin. Spencer Bower contrasted the spinners' calm concentration with the energetic movement of mists, water and the drive wheels swirling and weaving around them. The mists swirling around the edge of the narrow horizontal scene also contain and confine them; only the cut-off shape of the large spinning wheel on the left relieves this effect. The severe

spikey lines of the wheels' upright shafts offset the busy diagonal movements through the composition and give it stability. Instability is suggested by the broken white angular shapes placed in the centre of the group of spinners. This further emphasises their isolation from one another. These faceted cubist planes represent the limestone rock forming the cave. A similar Baroque design was followed in Rawene and Summer's Day, although Spencer Bower combined it here with energetic surface effects, by scumbling and rubbing the matt acrylic paint.

The Spinner, No. 1 was first exhibited in the 1967 Group Show with another work entitled The Spinner, No. 2. It was shown again in an exhibition of Spencer Bower's landscape and spinning paintings in 1980, when it was described by critic John Coley as "a lyrical piece animated by the gentle rhythms weaving through the image and suggesting the movement of the spinning wheel itself.[35] In this show it was exhibited as Spinners No.1. It is the concept and imagery that invites enquiry and analysis. Spencer Bower's decision to depict her friends in this setting invites this because she described the caves as "terrifying". This response is not unusual, because the primal quality of such caves can invoke this response. It has been passed down in art through the Germanic landscape tradition and in literature. In creating this work Spencer Bower may have drawn on folk tales that portray spinster heroines being shut away in isolation to work. Fear and oppression is followed by a happy ending, usually when an ideal hero discovers and releases them. Such fairy tale fantasies were created and told by women as they spun, and the origins have been preserved in language: to spin a tale or a yarn or to weave dreams. The associations may have been forgotten but the original meanings reflect the long hours women spent spinning together and telling stories. Literary precedents for her

imagery might be found in folklore, with the psychological implications of the sources underlining the work. The cave may be read as a metaphor for the domestic sphere because Spencer Bower has integrated elements of both into the painting. The women busy spinning and dreaming are oblivious to their incongruous surroundings, so that on one level the cave may be a symbol of isolation and the loneliness of the individual.

Three spinners are the subject of a work which demonstrates another dimension of Spencer Bower's approach to figurative painting in the 1960s. Untitled (Three Spinners)[36][49] c. 1968, is different in mood and intention to the works discussed above, partly because of its high keyed primary colour and because it has been inspired by Gauguin's painting, The Vision after the Sermon (Jacob Wrestling with the Angel), 1888 [Fig.51].[37] She substituted his imagery and iconography with her own.

These spinners have been formed into an integrated and animated group, unlike those in the majority of the Spinners paintings. They are seated in a parallel row in an abstract setting dominated by a red monochrome band filling the central picture space. A smaller blue band at the top of the picture denotes the sky. The illusion of movement and depth within these flat empty spaces is obtained by subtle tonal modulation through scumbling and the uneven brushwork which reveals the white primer. The row of spinners intercepts the curving horizon line to further this illusion. Their puppet-like forms are silhouetted by an effervescent light seen on the horizon behind the parted forms of the pair at left. The effect is a light mood and the sensation of metaphysical space rather than the enclosed space of an interior, as in, for instance, Three Spinners [Fig.54]. The foreground is taken up by an abstract arrangement of the parts of spinning wheels. These assist in giving the

illusion of spatial recession because they are proportionally larger than the spinning group, whilst the red area dividing them serves a similar dual function to the symbolic red field in Gauguin's work: suggesting temporal distance between objects and connecting them psychologically. It also acts as a symbolic barrier between the real world and the imaginary world of the painting.

Spencer Bower had been experimenting with modernist ideas and styles in her figurative paintings since the late 1940s, when she indicated her interest in Post-Impressionism and Symbolism in the Rawene series. She was cautious in her approach to abstraction, because she wanted to retain the idea of the real person or object. A new development in her approach is indicated in this painting because the cluster of spinning wheels in the foreground have been deconstructed and treated as fragmented overlapping Cubist planes. Another Cubist device is found in the centre foreground, where an abstract shape representing the bench of a spinning wheel imitates the texture of woodgrain. In addition, the drive wheels retain their circular form but are transformed into ambiguous coloured and patterned abstract shapes. This opens the possibility of alternative readings of the content.

The arrangement of spinning wheels can be read allegorically, personifying a group of women who form an audience to the group of spinners. The design resembles the arrangement of figures and costumes in the foreground of The Vision after the Sermon. The decorative circular wheels substitute for the caps and bonnets of the Breton women and man in Gauguin's work, where they form an audience to a visionary re-enactment of a Biblical story. Spencer Bower's illusionary audience may do the same, because another allusion to Gauguin's imagery is seen in the spinner on the

right. The shape of her winged chair resembles angels wings, whilst the similarities of line and pattern between Gauguin's wrestlers and the spinning group supports this comparison. Two elongated spinning wheel uprights connect the two groups by pointing directly to the spinner above. Another irony found in Spencer Bower's painting is the mysterious intrusion of a masked figure who appears behind her signature on the left and looks out at the viewer, surreptitiously creating a bridge between two worlds.

Spencer Bower's symbolism is esoteric and elusive so that the specific meaning of this work is not easily identified. She does not make an explicit allusion to a scriptural passage as Gauguin does, although references to women spinning do include a descriptive passage in Exodus (35:25) about the "wise hearted" women who spun blue, scarlet and purple thread for the curtains of Moses' Tabernacle. She may allude to the Nativity. Narrative scenes from the Bible in Early Christian art include depictions of the Virgin Mary spinning in the presence of an angel, her spindle and work basket indicating her womanly virtues and sanctifying the craft. Spencer Bower may have only intended to play on Gauguin's idea in a pictorial sense, but in doing so she replaced his Biblical scene of physical violence with one that expresses peace and harmony between the subjects.

The three spinners are presented as an integrated unit. Their stylized forms and those of their spinning wheels overlap in a repetitive rhythmic pattern, like the notation in a bar of music. The simplified and flattened parts of the three spinning wheels form a geometric pattern of triangles intersected by three circles, the outlines being freely brushed in. Each solid wheel is painted in a different opaque pastel tone: blue, pink and mellow red. The variations of colour and shape also denote the individuality of the spinners whose garments are a neutral brown. The faceless spinners are treated as

primitive, almost androgynous beings with pin heads, the style reflecting Spencer Bower's interest in Picasso. They are also differentiated by variations in form and pose. The central figure stands out because of her geometric torso and the dark hollow of her curving arms, which suggest the Nativity scene as an explanation for the imagery. In contrast, the expansive square shoulders of the spinner on the right complements the odd rectangular object raised on legs at her right. It represents either her wool basket or skein holder. Spencer Bower focuses attention on this action by depicting the white thread of fibre connecting person and object. The exaggerated poses of the spinners combine with the linear pattern of the wheels to create an energetic rhythm. The work captures the optimistic mood and style of the 1960s, so that the spinners resemble a group of pop musicians performing under the spotlight on a colourful stage. Perhaps Spencer Bower intended this analogy, to update Gauguin's Symbolist imagery and place it in a modern context where the visions and idols of the past are replaced by the idols of modern youth.

Spencer Bower adapted the image of the three spinners to works in different media and styles to express different moods and emotions. Demonstrating this range, the group from the previous painting reappear in a romantic work that is timeless and mystical in feeling. Untitled (Three Spinners) [38] is a pen and wash work showing the spinners seated around a tree in a brooding surreal landscape [Fig.50]. The forms of the spinners and their wheels are finely etched in with bold swirling lines that show the sureness of her draughtsmanship. Drama is achieved through the swirling mists and shadows of black wash that encircle and weave over them. This lyrical work shares the sensibility of the English neo-romantics, Piper, Sutherland and Moore, rather than that of Gauguin. The mood and imagery shifts again in

another black and white work, Untitled (Spinning Rhythm) [Fig.60]. [39] Four spinners, including the woman seated on the winged sling chair, are aligned in a diagonal row. Another, barely visible, sits facing right in the foreground, at lower left. The atmosphere vibrates with movement and dynamic rhythmic energy. The calligraphic brushstrokes that define the forms describe the constant whirring of the spinning wheels and the spinner's animated conversation. Empty spaces are spontaneously filled in with scumbled and stippled brushwork that heightens the mood. In contrast to most of the spinning works, those in this group are seen to communicate. The two central figures leantowards one another and the close-knit row of wheels and people is linked together by decorative curving lines and spirals. The conviviality of the spinning bee expresses another facet of women's lives and of the artist's response to the theme.

An oil painting, Spinners, [40] 1968, also demonstrates Spencer Bower's consistent experimentation to alter the mood and style of the spinning paintings to produce unusual and unexpected variations. The five subjects in this work are motionless and mute while the underlying geometric surface pattern provides the movement. The stasis and detachment of the figures purposefully imposes a symbolist sense of disengagement into a fantasy world. Spencer Bower has combined an eclectic range of images and styles from well known paintings and artists. The fragmented abstract landscape setting might be inspired by Serusier's ' Le Talisman', 1888. [41] The ground surface is represented by irregular patches of red, blue and mauve colour and the background foliage and sky by a synthesis of pink, blue, green and gold. The figures are also treated as flat abstract planes of saturated colour. Arranged in a semi-circle, the forms of the spinners and wheels are differentiated from the landscape by dark tonalities and thick contour lines.

The spinners are represented ambiguously and take on another persona. While the two women in the foreground are spinners, the one seated in the lower left corner could also be an angel holding a shield. The frontal stance of the woman on the right is accentuated by her large solid blue frame and hair. The image of the passive woman above her is inspired by Whistler's portrait of his mother.[42] The still life arrangement of spinning wheels in the centre of the picture imitates Picasso's primitive style. The profiled proud figure to their left wearing a blue cape and beret may parody Gauguin. Unlike the others this subject has facial features denoted, including a beard. The mysterious presence of a male amongst the spinners only adds to the esoteric nature of this work.

Spencer Bower's intentions in interpreting the spinners in this way are not readily explained. They do reflect the cultural and artistic mood of the 1960s, the decade of joyful confidence and optimism, particularly in their use of irony and allusion. Spencer Bower obviously found the prevailing mood of this period suited her temperament. Her trip to Europe may provide an explanation for the treatment of these two works. They possibly record her response to the modern art she saw on her tour of Europe and Britain and they may indicate which artists left an impression on her. The Russian collections of works by Gauguin, Matisse and Picasso may have inspired the references to these artists, while Whistler's painting was later mentioned by Spencer Bower as a work that impressed her on this visit.[43] Her trip to Russia may have influenced another aspect of the Spinners series: her interest in introducing an element of folk story to some of these works. In her travel notes she recorded the names of three modern Russian artists who had introduced traditional folk art elements into their works: Larionov,

Gontcharova and Malevich.[44]

Historical links between the past and the present may also be found in Green Spinners. Triptych, [45], c. 1969, which evokes associations with peasant women spinners. The acrylic triptych depicts a circle of women spinning in a large field or forest glade. The background is closed by the shady forest which blurs into a dense mass of greenery. A row of five white spots shaped like teardrops is shown above the high horizon in the centre panel; they indicate light caught on the trees. This adds to the effect created by the atmospheric colour of a shaded green world, a secluded pastoral setting where the group of women meet and relax together far removed from public life and care.

This triptych is formed from three separate panels. Spencer Bower used the traditional format only this once in a figurative work. She possibly developed the idea of integrating the triple division internally into the work after painting this. Of the paintings of women spinning in interior settings Spinning, 1971, is the only one using this concept which she dated. In Green Spinners. Triptych she followed the format also used by other contemporary New Zealand artists such as Louise Henderson, Colin McCahon and William Sutton, where a landscape is physically intercepted and divided to reinforce the idea of the painting as a two-dimensional object. But instead of a landscape, she used the triptych concept for her own figurative iconography. She perhaps utilised the conventions of religious triptych painting to evoke an association between her work and traditional European antecedents. She adapted the triptych to impart a sense of timelessness and symbolism to her imagery and so avoid a misreading of it as descriptive realism or anecdotal genre. The frame also forms a window into an imaginary world. This convention is

followed through into the content. Although the spinners form a continuous circle through the three panels, the central panel is also a self-contained painting containing the main subjects. The focal point is the group of three spinners in the centre. The figures resemble the trio in Untitled (Three Spinners).

She has evoked an association with the past by giving the modern spinners the semblance of Breton peasant women. She has used the combination of complementary green and scarlet colours for emotional impact. The women wear wide-brimmed sun hats which in some instances take on the appearance of traditional peasant headgear. With the exception of the three in the centre, they wear shapeless green or blue shifts which meld them into their surroundings The woman in the middle resembles popular portrayals of Breton peasant women dressed in black costume with a white apron and bonnet [Fig.52]. [46] She is placed slightly higher and apart from the others, her bonnet being accented by a touch of white light. Her spinning wheel is accented by a black outline, and it points in the direction of the solitary tree to signify its importance, at least for the artist. This spinner's tranquil pose also differentiates her, particularly from the energetic spinners flanking her. Wearing brown and green hats and grey trousers, they look like peasant men, an unlikely intrusion into this group. But they could also represent contemporary women wearing trousers, juxtaposed with a spinner from another culture and era. The idea was appropriate in the context of the period when the work was painted, since the revival of spinning in the sixties was associated with the "back to nature" movement. This revived historical associations with rural women who for centuries remained economically self-sufficient by spinning. Spencer Bower also differentiated the three women in the foreground. They form an impromptu audience staring in surprise at the scene before them. They act as if they have suddenly seen a

vision as Gauguin's superstitious peasant women do. It might be a scene from folk story or the historical past, in either case Spencer Bower wanted the viewer to enter into the spinners' world of fantasy.

Spencer Bower could have drawn on her own memories of Brittany. She stayed there for a month in the summer of 1929, mainly at Concarneau, when she made many sketches of the local women. With the usual fascination of the tourist, in her writings she described in detail their costumes and religious ceremonies. Although her stay was broken when she got measles and had to return to London she had spent a happy and productive time there in the company of other artists, including Sydney Thompson.[47] She revisited Brittany on a camping holiday in 1964, so it was fresh in her mind. A similar mood of companionship is found in this work. Spencer Bower may have introduced this autobiographical element into the triptych, which is a composite work utilising her sketches of individual women observed while spinning with a group.

Three Spinners,[48] 1968, is similar in arrangement and imagery to Untitled (Two Spinners), although the mood is more restrained [Fig.54]. The energetic surface treatment of the oil in the former is substituted by a smooth, flat finish in acrylic. Resembling a bas relief, the horizontal composition is classical in its formal simplicity, adding to the poised and serene mood of the three women spinners. They are seated behind their spinning wheels aligned in a row placed parallel to the picture plane. The only other object in the work is the rectangular wool holder from which the central spinner draws wool with her left hand. These are represented as fine pink strands hanging loosely at her side. Her other hand is turned upwards as it feeds wool to the bobbin. Similarly, the hands of the woman on the right are given

emphasis as they clasp and guide the wool. The lines of her shoulders and upraised arms are repeated in the shape of the cloth on her lap and the contours of the wheel. A similar interrelationship of shape and pattern between the human forms and the objects they use is seen in the other figure units. The motion of the rotating circular wheels is suggested by the curving lines of the turning spokes. Other than this, the women sit silently and still in a timeless setting. The rhythmic motion and sound of the wheels pervades the scene and lulls the women into a dreamy reflective mood.

This effect is created through a limited colour range of muted pastel pink, blue and green hues. The acrylic paint has been freely applied in layers of thin washes. The transparent veils in pastel tones give an ethereal poetic quality to the work. Transparent washes of pink and green have been put over the opaque white of the women's garments and spinning wheels to further blend them into their surroundings. A gently curving horizontal line divides the composition into a ground surface and backdrop. This is broken up by subtle variations in tone and colour that give a veiled gossamer effect. The tonal gradation and colour place each woman in her own intimate space to express Spencer Bower's idea that the spinning women occupied separate, private worlds. The pink aura surrounding the woman on the left gradually merges with white in the centre until it becomes absorbed into the blue aura of the woman on the right. The brushwork is modulated so that it expresses differences in their mood and character, ranging from a smooth even finish on the left to a patchy surface at right. Similarly, the downturned head and serene facial expression of the woman lost in thought on the left contrasts with the active gaze of the woman sitting upright at the opposite side. Her profiled head is turned towards the left, although rather than acknowledging their presence, she seems to gaze beyond the other women into the distance. The quiet dignity and introspective nature of the women

seated in this ethereal setting invites a comparison with the mythical Fates. They were traditionally represented as three women spinning: 'Clotho held the distaff, Lachesis drew off the thread and Atropos cut it short.'[49] The powerful Fates originated in men's fear and awe of women, [50] and their activity illustrates and symbolises the central role spinning played as a female occupation in the ancient world.

Although each woman retains her individuality through variations in detail such as posture and dress, the treatment of the figures recalls an earlier work, Silver and Gold, where Spencer Bower abstracted and distorted the forms of the two women in the background, to give them a primeval organic quality. They indicated the direction Spencer Bower took in the 'Spinners' series in her treatment of the human form. This approach was partly inspired by Henry Moore, whose influence can be seen in the strongly simplified forms [Fig.63].[51]

Spencer Bower developed her theme of individual women becoming isolated into separate worlds in a number of works related to Three Spinners. This is visibly expressed in a watercolour work, Spinning, [52] [Fig.56] c. 1971, where the composition is divided into three sections defined by vertical bands of colour. Spencer Bower conceived this work as a triptych. The formal division and the symbolism of this work are perfectly integrated. The compact space occupied by the woman and her spinning implements in the central panel is slightly higher than that on the left and right. The spatial relationships between the three juxtaposed sections are dislocated to reinforce the meaning. The rich colour combination of burnt sienna and magenta connects the three sections, creating an emotionally charged atmosphere. Filled with decorative detail and saturated with colour, this work is essentially

romantic in spirit. In contrast, the treatment of another watercolour, Orange Spinning Wheels,[53] is fresh and light [Fig.55]. The white paper shows through the translucent colour and combines with pale orange washes in the background to give a feeling of open, airy space. The overlapping of the spinning wheels on the right provides a point of contact between the spinners, although the three vertical divisions are still retained, being indicated by a strip of orange paint on the left and the maidens of the spinning wheels on the right.

In 1971 Spencer Bower produced Spinning, [54][Fig.57] a work which may be considered the summation of her paintings of the three spinners because of its complexity and richness. The figures of the previous three paintings discussed reappear in Spinning, where their appearance and pose has been subtly modified further to render their essence and to complete their metamorphosis from reality into fantasy. They are similarly placed in a parallel row seated at their spinning wheels. However, the spatial division between each has been widened to accentuate the idea of separateness and isolation. The triptych division has been retained. It is indicated by the lines dividing the panels of variegated colour behind them. At the same time, they are not spinning alone. Spencer Bower added a fourth woman, seated below them in the middle foreground. The presence of other spinners is implied by the abstract yellow circles denoting their spinning wheels. The faint outlines of two more people can be seen at lower left and at top right. The three enigmatic spinners are part of a spinning bee arranged in the customary fashion in a circle. This is indicated by the arrangement of six solid yellow and gold wheels which forms an oval pattern, beginning at lower right with the semi-circle and moving across to the left to where a woman sits framed by the circular shape of a peacock chair. It then curves around to the right and continues across the centre of the composition horizontally to

culminate in the wheel at centre right. By only showing two-thirds of this wheel and the two in the lower foreground Spencer Bower opened the picture space to suggest that other spinners are also participating in the activity.

Spencer Bower depersonalised by abstraction the women beyond the point where they can be identified as individual people as though she intended them to be read in a hieratic or iconic sense. The contemplative spinner placed in the dominant central position has a mysteriousdouble image. She sits at a slight angle, while the shape of her body is echoed in the form of a gray figure immediately behind her. It almost envelops her and may represent her aura, or perhaps it is an evocation of an archetypal or mythical spinner from the distant past. This spinner also assumes a position of importance because the other spinners are turned to face her. The woman in the foreground has twisted her head up quickly, almost as if she has just seen the unexpected apparition. She is differentiated from the other spinners, colouristically and spatially, and could represent a contemporary spinner viewing an imaginary world of myth or fantasy. The trio of spinners could represent the Fates. Spencer Bower knew of the legend of the "moon-spinners - the three naiads with their spindles winding, winding the moon, till it is unravelled, and one moonless night is left for the hunter to ride... And then washing the wool, which unwinds into a thread across the sea and thus back to the moon."[55] The treatment of the wheels and setting also evoke this association.

A mythical reading is also suggested by the rich Byzantine colour and texture. The composition is created by using geometrical shapes delineated by colour. In another sense, the space around the spinners is dissolved into veils and nuances of colour to impart their auras and emotions. The intense pink already seen in Getting About, No.3 is the dominant hue, but a variety

of surface textures and variegated transparent layers of blues, reds and yellows are obtained by using different techniques. A detail shows the luminous veiled effect obtained from glazing with added medium, and the vigorous use of scumbling, scratching and dribbling with a thick brush [Fig.58]. The areas vigorously scumbled with a water saturated brush produce lyrical gossamer effects.

Spencer Bower used these techniques in The Spinners, [Fig.61] 56 c. 1971, and produced a virtuoso display, especially the rich emotive reds and glistening veils of white light. The colour is the central element of the painting and like the former work transforms the setting into a fantasy world. The scene shows three women, two of whom are spinning, while the third woman's face and actions are obscured. The figures are observed from an oblique viewpoint. The women are seated apart, and the ambiguous spatial relationships make it difficult to ascertain whether they occupy the same room. The two women seated at left and in the centre background have been individualised through the delineation of facial features and one important details the hands and feet of the spinner at left. The third woman partially seen in the lower right corner turns her back to her audience and twists her head sharply away from the other spinners. Although her face is not seen her torso and the rich texture of her garment seen at close proximity makes her presence felt. The sharp twisting movement of her head sets up an element of narrative in the picture because the woman in the rear appears to respond to it. The woman spinning at left is thoughtful and alert. Spencer Bower has given her sharp features and black-rimmed downcast eyes. Only the woman in the background lacks the introspective passivity of many earlier spinners in the series.

It is as though templates were used for all three subjects. They can be seen in different guises in other spinning works, for example, the similar form of the woman in the background is seen in Spinning, 1968 [Fig.66]. The torso form of the figure at right is seen in the 'Getting About' paintings now in the Best and Holm collections. The dominant red colour is brushed in broad strokes up from the base to the centre of the picture and around the women, connecting them visually but dividing them psychologically and emotionally. The decorative and symbolic colour combines with a hovering aerial viewpoint to close the wall space around the women and heighten the dramatic effect. The background is formed of three textured screens of colour and the women are arranged in a pyramidal composition in the tight space. The darker toned red and blue mottling on the left panel becomes blurred and lighter in the centre panel through scumbling and rubbing. On the right of the woman at rear the atmosphere dissolves into webs and veils of shimmering white light. This sweeps down over the abstracted spinning wheel and the ambiguous green shape to the woman in the foregound. Spencer Bower has incorporated a variety of textures and patterns drawing on her knowledge of a variety of mediums. The lyrical passage below the shield-like orange wheel uses translucent washes like watercolour, to give the hint of a spinning wheel and the woman's feet. In contrast the other drive wheel is heavy and solid, like the spinner's feet working the treadle. Her white arms and hands are also opaque and outlined with a fine black line to accentuate them working the wool and moving in unison with her feet.

Mitchell's description of Spencer Bower's observations of spinners at work expresses the rhythmic movement of this spinner:

> Olivia worked at first directly drawing the spinners, noting many times the way the wool passed from hand to spindle, whorling to wheel, drawing the action and the constant rhythm between the

spinner, her hands and her wheel.[57]

In this work the body of the spinning wheel is dematerialised into its surroundings by its red coating and the foreshortened spindle is a decorative shape resembling a cornet. The spinner is placed in this prominent position to draw attention to her activity, but the imagery suggests there are other layers of meaning in the work. The dull green of her dress relates her to the woman at right. Both look tired and unhappy. In contrast, the spinner in the background is presented in a regal manner. She is less naturalistic than the other women. Sitting on a pedestal at the top of the pyramidal composition she draws attention to her status by her glamorous shimmering gown and proud, upright appearance. She exudes the self assurance and confidence which the other two women lack.

Spinning, [58] 1968, is the summation of Spencer Bower's vision of women spinning in the landscape [Fig.66]. It depicts two monumental spinners seated together before a cliff face punctured with caves and clefts. The women are presented as female archetypes.[59] Spencer Bower possibly used the Castle Hill limestone caves as a motif and a source of reference for the imaginary primeval setting. The rock was given the illusion of geological accuracy by dragging a brush over the white ground and cross hatching to get the correct texture. The caves were perceived in a different light in this work when the close and confined interior used in Spinners, No.1 was replaced by a distanced exterior view. Spencer Bower chose a muted evocative image, showing the women spinning in a broad space which opens to the sky. The identity of the textured yellow-hued surface is ambiguously stated, but it suggests sun bleached yellow grass or a sea of sand. The spinners sit in the shadow of the cliff which curves around to their left unseen and partly shields them from the sun. The cliffs close around the symbolic golden plain to form both an isolating and a protective barrier, but the spinners face away

from them and the viewer towards an unseen sight. Spencer Bower chose warm, natural hues for pictorial and symbolic means to show the harmonious relationship between the women and their setting. The landscape colours are reproduced in a garment of patchwork on the nearest woman, while the second appears to be clad in an enveloping second skin. The patchwork treatment evokes associations between the spinner and other traditional female crafts, patchwork and weaving, perhaps intentionally. Art and craft activities are brought together in this work through the painter's act of creating the work.

The economical design complements Spencer Bower's treatment of the subjects. There are three primary rectangular areas. The two spinners and their wheels are obliquely aligned left of centre in the middle ground, and counterbalanced by the cave opening at top right. The dark horizontal band of the rock face also acts as a stabilising counterweight to the expanse of yellow grass covering three-quarters of the picture. The vertical lines of the spinning wheels' elongated uprights and maidens are repeated in the chairs. They are also echoed in the upright stance of the motionless women. This vertical emphasis conventionally signifies power, strength and dignity; Spencer Bower's handling suggests this in a subtle, non-aggressive way, using rhythmic flowing curvilinear lines and a predominance of rounded shapes. The shadow cast over the woman's face and body also accentuates the verticality. On another level this light/dark contrast signifies the duality of the human condition.

Spencer Bower's association of the woman at left with the cave diagonally opposite to her is shown in the similarity of shape and colour between her head and body and the cave opening. The white shape, denoting either a protective apron and wool fibre or a patch of light falling on her arm and legs, forms

a similar pattern to the curving stream in the cave. The artist has reinforced this association by using a lighter tonality on the cliff face on the right side of the cave. The symmetrical half-shadowed effect on the woman's face appears to be taken from her earlier painting, Alison Pickmere,[60] c. 1943 [Fig.65]. She kept this portrait of her friend in her possession so it was an accessible source of ideas. The same treatment applies to the other woman, whose shaded brown head simulates the image of the darker cave slightly to her left. The heads of both women are also framed by the cave openings seen directly above them.

The women's forms are smooth and rounded as if they had sat in that place and weathered the elements longer than the rough cliffs and yellowed ground; they are timeless beings engaged in their endless task. Despite their mute, earthbound and timebound quality they are not treated alike. The figure on the left is more harmoniously proportioned, giving her a primitive simplicity which is echoed in the lines of her chair. Moore's influence is evident in the treatment of the figures; he also related his archaic female figures to the land [Fig.62-63].[61] She has also drawn on earlier and original sources for her images to link the past to the present. This is suggested by the figure on the right who is archaic in a primeval sense. Her squat, lumpy torso and narrow thumb-like head gives her a resemblance to Palaeolithic figurines of fertility goddesses.[62]

Spencer Bower would have found an accessible source of inspiration for her composition in Making Ligurian Lace, [Fig.64], [63] Henry La Thangue's painting in the McDougall Art Gallery collection. It shows two Italian peasant women working at their craft in a sunny, secluded lane. Although La Thangue's work is a realist painting some similarities exist between the

two, suggesting that Spencer Bower studied it before arriving at her own conception. La Thangue's setting is an isolated rural village. The young women sit in a stony lane that curves gently out of sight. Similarly, the spinners are seated next to a pathway that curves out of sight beyond the cave entrance on the right. In La Thangue's work the same curving pattern is evident in the branches, leading to a closed doorway beyond. The background is also closed by stone walls. In both paintings the women are seated in bright sunshine, denoted in Spinning by the symbolic colour and the red wheels. The enclosed spaces and natural warmth of these scenes mask the realities of life. The women are in harmony with their undisturbed settings. They share a quiet dignity and absorption in their endless work. Spencer Bower borrowed freely from La Thangue's imagery and arrangement of the two lace-makers, aligning the spinners in the composition similarly and noting details such as the aprons, chair legs and the end of the pink lace making pillows. She observed that this resembled a drive wheel spinning. Spencer Bower did not share La Thangue's sentimentality nor his conception of the women subjects. She interpreted the women spinners as archetypes.

In the context of Spencer Bower's total output Spinning may now be considered a seminal work. It was overlooked by the reviewers of her 1968 Retrospective exhibition in Christchurch, although it was reproduced in a journal review in *Ascent* which gave her work national acknowledgement.[64] Her spinning series however attracted local attention in 1980 when a reviewer noticed the subtleties of her expression. David Brokenshire wrote: "Women spinning in groups are but the starting point for possibly Miss Spencer Bower's finest work. Subjective colour in areas, in veils, weave over the surface. Here are master works by a mature artist...." [65] Doris Lusk has observed that Spencer Bower's "Spinners" works created a

lot of attention when they were exhibited because "Olivia used acrylics in a fairly dramatic sort of way." They were a new development for Olivia. She "wasn't a young painter...she moved to something different in them, ...a daring style".[66]

Spencer Bower frequently painted groups of women, engaged in activities associated with the cultural and domestic spheres because these subjects were accessible to her and she had the opportunity to observe them and study their personalities and moods. This familiarity gave her a perception of them different to that of a male artist who would not have the same access, or, as the uniqueness of her subject matter of spinners suggests, the same interest. Her long periods of observation and study of women at work spinning coupled with her interest in the craft gave her an insight into its universal significance as a woman's activity. The observations of women together in groups or alone led to works which demonstrated her abiding interest in the nature of human relationships. She was not concerned with the dominant contemporary New Zealand theme of the isolated folk hero, the 'man alone'; by placing the women spinners in familiar but unexpected landscape settings she used myth and metaphor to express her feelings about people and places she identified with and to explore deeper associations between women and their world. Drawing on her own experiences and observations and working within the boundaries of her social and artistic milieu she produced works which related to the experiences of women.

ENDNOTES

1. Leone Stewart, "An artist looks back on half a century of painting and creating." *The Christchurch Press*, 22 Nov. 1977, p. 23.

2. Marion L. Channing, *The Magic of Spinning*, Marion, Mass., 1966, p. 16.

3. Ibid., p. 14.

4. Cup by Euaion Painter, "Woman Spinning", Staatliche Museum, Berlin: reproduced in J. Boardman, *Athenian Red Figure Vases: The Archaic Period*, London, 1975, fig. 370.

5. Eva Keuls, *The Reign of the Phallus*, New York, 1985, p. 233.

6. Annunciation and Adoration of the Magi, Mosiacs, c. 432 - 40 A.D., Sta. Maria Maggiore, Rome: reproduced in F. Hart, *Art: A History of Painting, Sculpture, Architecture*, Vol.I., London, 1976, pl. 327.

7. Keuls, p. 234.

8. Velazquez, The Tapestry Weavers or Fable of Arachne, 1657?, Oil on canvas, Prado, Madrid: reproduced in J.E.Muller, *Velasquez*, London, 1976, pl. 117.

9. Olivia Spencer Bower, "Discoveries", *C.S.A. News*, No.49, May/June, 1973, pp. 10-11.

10. Walter Ashford, letter to the author, 28 April 1988.

11. Ibid.

12. Dick Brittan in conversation with me, 3 August 1988.

13. This small drawing is in the collection of the Olivia Spencer Bower Foundation, Christchurch.

14. The Happy Spinners, c. 1967, Acrylic, signed lower left, Collection of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchuch.

15. Notes, Spencer Bower Papers, McDougall Archives.

16. A. Mitchell, *Olivia Spencer Bower Retrospective* catalogue, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch, 1977, n. pag.

17. Letter, Spencer Bower Papers, McDougall Archives.

18. Spinning, 1968, Oil, signed lower right, 915 x 660 mm., location unknown, believed to be in a private collection in the U.S.A.: reproduced in colour in *Ascent*, Vol.1., No.3, April 1969.

19. Grindstones, Queenstown, c. 1950, Watercolour, signed lower left, Collection of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.

20. Mitchell.

21. Holiday Time, c. 1966, Watercolour, signed lower right, Brittan Collection, Rangiora.

22. Minta and Dorothy at Enys, c. 1967, Acrylic, signed lower left, 761 x 579 mm., Cumming Collection, Christchurch.

23. Summer's Day, c. 1967, Watercolour, signed lower right, Thompson Collection, Christchurch.

24. Brittan.

25. Esther Hope, The Spinner in the Sunporch, Watercolour, c.1946, reproduced in *New Zealand Yearbook of the Arts*, No. 2, 1946, p. 42.

26. Spencer Bower, quoted in Mitchell.

27. Untitled (Two Spinners), c. 1967, Oil on board, signed lower left, 600 x 890 mm., Collection of the Olivia Spencer Bower Foundation, Christchurch.

28. These wheels were owned by Minta Brittan.

29. Quoted in Mitchell.

30. Ibid.

31. John Oakley, "Interesting Exhibition of New Zealand Art", *The Christchurch Star*, November 28, 1970, p. 21.

32. Spencer Bower Note draft, op. cit.

33. The Group Show catalogue, 1966. These figures were taken from English church rubbings and placed in imaginary landscape settings.

34. Spinners No. 1, c. 1967, Acrylic on board, signed lower left, 1105 x 559 mm., Hewson Collection, Christchurch.

35. John Coley, "Olivia Spencer Bower: still going strong," *The Christchurch Star*, 26 November, 1980.

36. Untitled (Three Spinners), c. 1968, Acrylic on board, signed lower left, 900 x 650 mm., Collection of the Olivia Spencer Bower Foundation, Christchurch.

37. Paul Gauguin, The Vision after the Sermon (Jacob and the Angel), 1888, Oil, National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh: reproduced in R. Shone, *The Post Impressionists*, London, 1979, pl. 63.

38. Untitled (Three Spinners), Pen and wash, signed lower right, 375 x 285 mm., Cumming Collection, Christchurch.

39. Untitled (Spinning Rhythm), Ink wash, Collection of the Olivia Spencer Bower Foundation, Christchurch.

40. Spinners, 1968, location not traced, photographed by Olivia Spencer Bower, this inscribed verso: "Spinners, Olivia Spencer Bower 1968, Laidlaw."

41. Paul Serusier, Landscape ('Le Talisman'), 1888, Oil, Allencon, Private Collection.

42. James McNeil Whistler, Arrangement in Grey and Black. No. 1: Portrait of the Artist's Mother, 1871, The Louvre, Paris.

43. Spencer Bower talking to Jack Shallcrass, "Looking Back", Radio New Zealand , November 1979.

44. Olivia Spencer Bower Foundation archives.

45. Green Spinners. Triptych, c. 1969, Acrylic on board, signed lower right, 768 x 1476 mm., three panels, Elliott Collection , Christchurch.

46. A comparison can be drawn with the costume of the peasant women in Emile Bernard's Breton Women in a Meadow, 1888, Oil, Private Collection France: reproduced in Shone, pl. 71.

47. Letters to her family, Spencer Bower Papers, Claxby; 1929 Diary, Spencer Bower Papers, McDougall Archives.

48. Three Spinners, 1968, Acrylic on board, signed lower left, size 641 x 1001 mm., McAlpine Collection, Christchurch.

49. Sir Paul Harvey, *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, Oxford, 1984, p. 174.

50. Keul, p. 233.

51. Henry Moore, Three Standing Figures, 1947-8, Plaster cast of original group in Battersea Park, illustrated in *Henry Moore* , Catalogue of the 1956 New Zealand Touring Exhibition, fig. 10; Spencer Bower Papers, McDougall Archives.

52. Spinning, c. 1971, Watercolour, signed lower right, 373 x 570 mm., Smith Collection, Ashburton.

53. Untitled (Orange Spinning Wheels), c. 1971, signed lower left, 640 x 877 mm., Cumming Collection, Christchurch.

54. Spinning, 1971, Acrylic on board, signed and dated lower right, 508 x 376 mm., Trengrove Collection, Christchurch. It is an acrylic painting on board measuring 605 x 1217 mm and is one of the largest works exhibited by the artist. She painted her largest works n the late sixties and early seventies, the largest being Festive, 1972, measuring 1210 x 900 mm, one of the five acrylic paintings in the 'Dancers' series. This development reflected her confident handling of a comparatively new medium and her interest in utilising its technical and expressionistic possibilities in large-scale, multi-figured compositions, which she was now able to develop over time. The reflective nature and the success of the retrospective exhibition which she organised in 1968 had given her the impetus to continue these new directions.

55. This description is taken from a letter written by an unidentified woman to Spencer Bower in response to seeing her Spinners paintings. She wrote: "Your Spinners surely do this." Spencer Bower Papers, McDougall Archives.

56. The Spinners, c. 1971, Acrylic, signed lower right, 508 x 376 mm., Collection of the Waikato Museum of Art and History, Hamilton.

57 Mitchell.

58. See reference no. 18 .

59. They could also represent the Fates, arbiters of the destinies of men; the imagery accords with the traditional conception of them: "He beholds the Fates, with the rock and shears; and hears the intoxicating hum of their spindle". [O.U.P.] The theme is asserted in the prominent placement of the whirring red spinning wheel in the foreground. Although this closely resembles the original the shafts are unnaturally twisted to point towards the woman's left hand grasping the yarn. Her pointed fingers also look like scissors or shears, while the second spinner's illuminated hands appear to grasp and spin golden thread. The hollow drive wheel and upright also form an abstract symbol.

60. Alison Pickmere, c. 1943, Oil on board, signed lower left, 457 x 237 mm., Collection of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.

61. For example, Henry Moore's Two Women Seated, 1940, Mixed media, illustrated in G. Grigson, *Henry Moore*, The Penguin Modern Painters, Harmondsworth, 1943, pl. 11.

62. Spencer Bower's adoption of this oldest art form prefigured its use as a motif by New Zealand feminist artist Claudia Pond Eyley.

63. Henry La Thangue, Making Ligurian Lace, c .1903-1911, Oil, Collection of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.

64. *Ascent*, op. cit.

65. Doris Holland in conversation with me, 26 February, 1988.

66. David Brokenshire, "New works by Olivia Spencer Bower," *The Christchurch Press*, 22 Nov. 1980.

APPENDIX A

OLIVIA SPENCER BOWER: EXHIBITIONS TO 1988

1961 *Works painted in Tahiti, Samoa and Fiji from June to September 1960*
9-19 March. Durham Street Art Gallery, Christchurch.

1968 *Retrospective Exhibition of People and Places*
7-12 November. Mair Gallery, Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery,. Christchurch.

1969 *Olivia Spencer Bower*
18 August - 5 September. Victoria University, Wellington.

1972 *Olivia Spencer Bower Retrospective Exhibition*
27 August - 13 September. Mair Gallery, Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery, Christchurch.

1974 *46 Watercolours 1929-1963*
March. Aigantighe Art Gallery, Timaru.

1976 *Beside the River 1936-1976*
8-19 March. Brooke Gifford Gallery, Christchurch.

1977 *Olivia Spencer Bower Retrospective Exhibition.*
22 November - 22 January. Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch. Exhibited in New Zealand centres 1978-1979.

1977 *A Selection of Watercolours*
5-21 December. Brooke/Gifford Gallery, Christchurch.

1977 *"Artists From the South" Recent Work.*
13-29 April.

1979 *Olivia Spencer Bower: A Selection of Watercolours*
17-28 September. Barry Lett Gallery, Auckland.

1979 *Olivia Spencer Bower. Watercolours*
3 September - 12 October. McMurray Gallery, Palmerston North.

1979 *Watercolours*
16 November - 3 December. Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery, Christchurch.

1980 *Olivia Spencer Bower. Works from the Collection*
3 May - 17 June, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.

1980 *Olivia Spencer Bower Paintings*
18 November - 30 November. Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery, Christchurch.

1982 *"Mostly Lake Ohau." Watercolours by Olivia Spencer Bower*
24 April - 7 May. Galerie Legard, Wellington.

1983 *A Review of the Artist's Work in Watercolour from the Late 1920's to the Mid 1970's*
4-14 July. John Leech Gallery, Auckland.

1985 *Drawings 1931-1975*
1-15 March. Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.

1986 *West Coast Watercolours*
26 March - 23 April. Greymouth Art Gallery, Greymouth
13 - 24 August. Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery, Christchurch.

1987 *European Paintings 1929-1965*
30 June - 12 July. Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery, Christchurch.

1988 *Fifty Years of Painting*
23 May - 12 June. Bishop Suter Art Gallery, Nelson.

OLIVIA SPENCER BOWER: GROUP EXHIBITIONS TO 1982

1939 *Centennial Exhibition of International and New Zealand Art*
10 November 1939- 1 April 1940. Wellington.

1950 *The Living Canterbury Artists' Loan Exhibition*
4-30 September. Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery, Christchurch.

1954 *New Zealand Artists 1954*
Victoria University Regional Council of Adult Education Community Arts Service. 4 April - 13 December. Toured Wellington Region.
Elsie Mourant Nancy Parker Olivia Spencer Bower.

1957 Argus House Gallery, Auckland.

1958 *Five New Zealand Watercolourists*
21 November - 14 December. Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland.
Olivia Spencer Bower, Rita Angus, T.A. McCormack,
Gabriell Hope, Eric Lee-Johnson.

1959 *Nelson Suter Art Society Spring Exhibition*
19 October - 1 November. Guest Artist.

1959 *New Zealand Government Exhibition to U.S.S.R*
Opened in Moscow April 1959. Toured centres for one year.

1959 *Group Show*
January. Gallery 91. Christchurch.

1960 *Group Loan Show*
27 October - 6 November. Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.

1962 *Contemporary New Zealand Painting and Sculpture*
November. Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland. Toured New Zealand 1963.

1965 *Painting, Silver, Sculpture and Ceramics*
15-25 July. Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery, Christchurch.

1967 *Canterbury Society of Arts Working Members' Drawings and Prints*
18 February - 12 March. Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery, Christchurch.

1967 *Canterbury Painting*
An Exhibition from the Permanent Collection of the Canterbury Society of Arts. Toured by the Department of Extension Studies, University of Canterbury.

1968 *10 Years of New Zealand Painting in Auckland, 1958 -1967*
March. Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland.

1968 *100 New Zealand Painters Exhibition*
Christchurch Pan Pacific Arts Festival. 9-30 March. Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery, Christchurch.

1969 *Prints- Drawings- Pottery Exhibition*
30 September - 11 October. Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery, Christchurch.

1969 *Landscapes from the Permanent Collection*
1-21 July. Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery, Christchurch.

1973 *Canterbury Confrontations*
Christchurch Arts Festival Exhibition. March. Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery, Christchurch.

1973 *University of Canterbury Centennial Exhibition*
Works by former students of the School of Fine Arts.

1974 *The Quest for Arcadia*
Commonwealth Games Exhibition. January. Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.

1974 *Ashburton Society of Arts Annual Exhibition*
Guest Artist.

1974 *New Zealand Works on Paper: 1935 - 1958*
26 November - 6 December. Peter McCleavey Gallery, Wellington. Olivia Spencer Bower, Rita Angus, M.T. Woollaston, Colin McCahon.

1975 *South Island Women Artists*
15 June - 4 July. Dowse Art Gallery, Lower Hutt.

1975 *New Zealand's Women Painters*
June. Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland.

1975 *Three Regionalists*
Works by Olivia Spencer Bower, A. Lois White and Robin White.
19 August - 2 September. Peter McCleavey Gallery, Wellington.

1975 *The President's Exhibition*
Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery, Christchurch.

1976 *Land 1976*
C.S.A. Festival Exhibition. 6-20 March. Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery, Christchurch.

1976 *Zonta Mixed-Media Exhibition*
8-25 November. Capricorn Gallery, Christchurch.

1976 *New Zealand Drawing 1976*
November. Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland.

1978 *Five Christchurch Painters*
20 August - 2 September. Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery, Christchurch.

1979 *Indoor/Outdoor Exhibition*
3-25 March. Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery, Christchurch.

1979 *Drawing 1979*
7-23 September. Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery, Christchurch.

1980 *Canterbury Society of Arts Centennial Exhibition*
6-25 September. Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery, Christchurch.

1981 *New Zealand Painting 1940-1960: Conformity and Dissension*
Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.

1981 *Hawkes Bay Art Society Annual Exhibition*
Guest Artist.

1982 *New Zealand Women Artists*
Marshall Seifert Gallery. May. Dunedin.

1982 *Small Format*
3-21 March. Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery, Christchurch.

1982 *Visual Autobiography*
23 June - 4 July. Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery, Christchurch.

INDEPENDENT GROUP EXHIBITIONS

New Zealand Society of Artists: 1933-34.

The Group: 1936 - 1977 (except 1948).

Rutland Group: 1943 - 1947.

SOCIETY OF ART ANNUAL EXHIBITIONS

Auckland Society of Arts: 1930-1952.

Canterbury Society of Arts: 1926-1952, 1954, 1957-58, 1960-63, 1965-68, 1970-71, 1973-75, 1977, 1980-82 .

New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts: 1931-1945.

Otago Art Society: 1930 - c.1940.

Suter Art Society: 1937-38.

APPENDIX B

CATALOGUE OF DOCUMENTED WORKS BY OLIVIA SPENCER BOWER IN PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Measurements are given in millimetres, height before width. Where the works were not sighted by the author the measurements were supplied by the institution. Wherever possible distinctions have been made as to whether measurements supplied for watercolours were sight size or paper size.

AIGANTIGHE ART GALLERY Timaru

The Untidy Verandah 1938

Watercolour and Tempera

375 x 467 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

Early Self Portrait n.d.

Watercolour

410 x 340 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

ASHBURTON PUBLIC LIBRARY Ashburton

Reading n.d.

Watercolour

720 x 478 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

ASHBURTON SOCIETY OF ARTS Ashburton

The Spinners 1973

Acrylic

905 x 595 (sight)

signed and dated: Olivia Spencer Bower 73 L.R.

AUCKLAND CITY ART GALLERY Auckland

Head of a Young Man (David Galbraith) 1946

Oil on Board

536 x 441

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

Dancing Dolmans 1929

Ink and Watercolour

245 x 345

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

La Piccola Marina 1931

Ink

245 x 345

signed: O.S.B. L.R.

Nor'west Light, Wakatipu n.d.

Watercolour

280 x 380 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

The Park, Holton, Le Moor, Lincolnshire 1929

Watercolour

244 x 339

signed and dated: Olivia Spencer Bower 1929 L.R.

Tussock Country 1957

Watercolour

762 x 540

unsigned.

Via Krupp, Capri 1931

Ink

335 x 230

signed: O.S.B. L.L.

Week's Sketching Class 1943

Ink wash

390 x 515

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Wet Day, Queenstown c. 1950

Watercolour, pencil and charcoal

343 x 480

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Tomatoes 1955

Pencil and watercolour

762 x 565

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Mackenzie Basin n.d.

Watercolour, gouache

590 x 820

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Snow On Hilltop, Banks Peninsula n.d. (Loan Collection)

Watercolour

299 x 395

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

BISHOP SUTER ART GALLERY Nelson

View from Eric Newton's Window 1965

Watercolour

373 x 485 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

CANTERBURY PUBLIC LIBRARY Christchurch

Regal Lilies n.d.

Watercolour and charcoal

442 x 567 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

Solomon's Seal c. 1950

Watercolour

482 x 711 (image)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Benevolent Presence 1977

Linoprint

310 x 310

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower.

The Dive 1958

Watercolour

500 x 810 (sight)

unsigned.

Beeches n.d.

Watercolour

477 x 557 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Dark Girl c. 1964

Watercolour

495 x 393 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

CANTERBURY SOCIETY OF ARTS Christchurch

At Envs 1962

Watercolour

565 x 680 (sight)

signed and dated: Olivia Spencer Bower 62 L.R.

Distant Erewhon c. 1960

Charcoal and watercolour

560 x 900 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Mackenzie Tussocks n.d.

Watercolour

390 x 530 (image)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

Pink Spinners n.d.

Acrylic on board

570 x 735

unsigned.

After The Flood c. 1976

Watercolour

545 x 740 (image)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

Memorial Avenue House n.d.

Watercolour

530 x 415 (image)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

Untitled (Circus Hands) 1949

Watercolour

On loan to the Manawatu Art Gallery.

The Bridge, Crickhowell, Wales c.1964

Watercolour

335 x 490 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

The Moraine n.d.

Watercolour

590 x 510 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

DOWSE ART MUSEUM Lower Hutt

Lake Hawea c.1975

Watercolour

754 x 547 (image)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

Three Seated Women n.d.

Watercolour

197 x 397 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY Dunedin

The Rawene River 1948

Watercolour

280 x 380

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Mackenzie Tussock n.d.

Watercolour

455 x 585

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Spinning Group 1966

Watercolour over pencil

550 x 750

signed and dated: Olivia Spencer Bower 1966 L.R.

Beech Forest n.d.

Watercolour

380 x 470

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

Mackenzie Country n.d.

Watercolour over charcoal

310 x 388

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

Near Castle Hill n.d.

Watercolour and charcoal

520 x 835

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Cave Stream n.d.

Watercolour and charcoal

555 x 742

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

THE HOCKEN LIBRARY University of Otago, Dunedin

Woodstock Terraces 1929

Watercolour

539 x 748 (sight)

Across Frankton Arm, Lake Wakatipu c. 1930

Watercolour

266 x 328 (sight)

Gran'pere of Tapore 1960

Watercolour and pencil

260 x 200 (sight)

Nelson 1958

Watercolour

477 x 566 (sight)

Portrait of Runa 1960

Gouache

567 x 440 (sight)

Flowers 1959

Watercolour

415 x 528 (sight)

MANAWATU ART GALLERY Palmerston North

The Violinist 1940

Watercolour

470 x 380 (sight)

signed.

Untitled (Circus Hands) 1949

Watercolour

460 x 385 (image)

(on loan from the Canterbury Society of Arts)

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Canterbury Plains 1940

Watercolour

490 x 670

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Girl In Chair 1940

Watercolour

490 x 390 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Sunny Day 1976

Watercolour

490 x 390 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Camping Manakau Inlet 1943

Watercolour

370 x 470 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Southern Alps c. 1943

Watercolour

410 x 590 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Painters at Mahurangi 1943

Watercolour

390 x 470

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

NATIONAL ART GALLERY Wellington

Grindstones 1952

Watercolour

460 x 616 (image)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Open Country n.d.

Watercolour

600 x 1055 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Evening n.d.

Watercolour

555 x 452 (image)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

Rosa Spencer Bower n.d.

Watercolour and charcoal

382 x 560

unsigned.

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF NEW ZEALAND

Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington

The School Launch, Rawene 1948

Pencil and watercolour

320 x 400 (image)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Organism 1948

Ink and pencil

410 x 340

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower

Self Portrait c. 1946

Oil on cardboard

640 x 420

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Rudi Gopas 1961

Oil on hardboard

510 x 420

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

on verso: Maori woman holding infant.

Margaret Frankel c. 1950

Oil on hardboard

470 x 370

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Olga c. 1945

Oil on cardboard

660 x 510

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Ngaio Marsh 1953

Oil on hardboard

700 x 600

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

Maori Woman Holding Infant 1948

Oil on hardboard

420 x 510

unsigned.

verso: Rudi Gopas.

Maori women at Rawene 1948

Pencil

205 x 290 (image)

unsigned.

Leo Bensemann 1961

Oil on hardboard

610 x 400

signed: O.S.B. L.R.

Maori Baby 1948

Pencil

230 x 200

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Frank Gross 1961

Oil on hardboard

540 x 380

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Doctor Smith off to Buy the Meat 1948

Watercolour

330 x 390 (image)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Korewha 1948

Pencil

190 x 250

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

Doris Lusk 1961

Oil on hardboard

610 x 400

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Doctor Smith of Rawene 1948

Pencil

270 x 210 (image)

unsigned

inscribed: Dr. Smith of Rawene.

Doctor Smith and his Wife at Home, Rawene 1948

Watercolour and pencil

420 x 530

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Doctor Smith of Hokianga 1948

Oil on board

420 x 390

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Doctor Smith of Rawene 1948

Pencil sketch

250 x 120

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

At Rawene 1948

Pencil sketch

170 x 200

Bill Sutton 1961

Oil on hardboard

610 x 360

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

Art School Model 1945

Oil on cardboard

650 x 520

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

ROBERT MCDOUGALL ART GALLERY Christchurch

La Piccola Marina, Capri 1931

Watercolour and pencil

465 x 645 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

Self Portrait 1950

Oil on board

672 x 520

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

The Verandah c. 1934

Watercolour

445 x 598 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

Bleached Terraces, Waimakariri River c. 1951

Watercolour

545 x 1505 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Camping, Piha, Auckland 1946

Watercolour

300 x 384 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Towards The Museum n.d.

Watercolour

537 x 760 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

The Remarkables n.d.

Watercolour

265 x 373 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Sunday At Greymouth 1970

Watercolour

310 x 385 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Queenstown n.d.

Watercolour

266 x 370 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

The Other Side 1976

Watercolour

528 x 710 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

Flatford Mill c. 1964

Watercolour

395 x 490 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Near Flatford Mill c. 1964

Watercolour

394 x 490 (sight)

signed: O.S.B. L.L.

Thames London c. 1964

Watercolour

254 x 356 (sight)

unsigned.

Art Class in the Conservatory n.d.

Watercolour

485 x 348 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

Queenstown and the Lake from the Snowfield n.d.

Watercolour

338 x 430 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Hop Fields Of Kent 1929

Watercolour

260 x 350

signed and dated: Olivia Spencer Bower 1929 L.R.

Fishing Village, Somerset, England 1930

Watercolour

360 x 350

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Girl in a Garden c. 1980

Watercolour

565 x 760 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Harbour with boats and jetty c. 1965

Watercolour

380 x 400

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Hokianga 1948

Watercolour

Harbour, Akaroa 1934

Watercolour

signed: O.S.B. L.R.

The Happy Spinners c. 1967

Acrylic on board

1080 x 755

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

Portrait c. 1977

Watercolour

480 x 230

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Rome 1931

Pen, ink and watercolour

250 x 350

signed: O. Spencer Bower L.R.

The Woolshed, Claxby - Shearing Time c. 1936

Watercolour sketch

350 x 450

unsigned.

Pottery Works n.d. (Loan Collection)

Watercolour

418 x 315 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

The Verandah c. 1934 (Loan Collection)

Watercolour

560 x 410 (sight)

unsigned.

Mountain and Plain n.d.

Watercolour

419 x 540 (sight)

unsigned.

The Grampians n.d.

Watercolour

390 x 490

unsigned.

Rising Mist Lake Wakatipu n.d.

Watercolour

240 x 310

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Grindstones, Queenstown c. 1950

Watercolour

375 x 290

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

The shed at Enys n.d.

Watercolour

600 x 490 (image)

unsigned.

Portrait of Alison Pickmere c. 1943

Oil on board

520 x 330

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

Nude Bending n.d.

Pencil

425 x 480 (sight)

unsigned.

Kaikoura n.d.

Watercolour

330 x 420 (sight)

unsigned.

Woman Reading n.d.

Pencil

unsigned.

ROTORUA ART GALLERY Rotorua

Miff's Garden 1962

Watercolour

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower

Mount Cook Range n.d.

Watercolour

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower

Kaikoura Coast 1962

Watercolour

320 x 405 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower

Still Life and Old Armchair, Olivia's House c. 1970

Ballpoint on paper

unsigned.

SARJEANT GALLERY Wanganui

The Kahautara River, Kaikoura c. 1950

Watercolour

415 x 579 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

Above Queenstown n.d.

Watercolour

330 x 415 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

WAIKATO MUSEUM OF ART AND HISTORY Hamilton

Mahurangi c. 1943

Watercolour

290 x 430 (sight)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

The Spinners c. 1971

Acrylic

408 x 376

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

The Terraces 1950

Watercolour

364 x 472

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Painting in Grafton Cemetary with John Weeks c. 1943

Pen and wash

358 x 408 (image)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

Untitled (Buildings in rural setting) 1943

Watercolour sketch

392 x 570 (image)

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Mahurangi Heads c. 1943

Watercolour

396 x 570

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

Lake Ohau Country 1974

Watercolour

550 x 730

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.R.

Hokianga 1948

Watercolour

298 x 380 (image)

unsigned.

Hokianga 1948

Watercolour

390 x 517

signed: Olivia Spencer Bower L.L.

WAIRARAPA ARTS CENTRE Masterton

Branches and Wind, Lake Ohau n.d.

Watercolour

549 x 728 (sight).

Cottages and Hills n.d.

Watercolour

439 x 567 (image).

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

New Lake And Mount Cook c. 1980

Watercolour

540 x 730 (sight)

signed.

CHRONOLOGY

1905 Olivia and twin brother Marmaduke born April 13th at St. Neots, Huntingdonshire, England; only children of Rosa M. Dixon (1865-1960) and Antony Spencer Bower (1851-1939).

1914 Family moves to Boscombe, Bournemouth.

1915 Olivia attends Grovely Manor, private girls' school. Rosa a visiting teacher of drawing & painting.

1918 Attends St Oswalds School. Taught watercolour technique of only three washes by teacher, Miss A.T. Coles.

1920 13th January, leaves England for New Zealand. Stays with aunt at Mt. Torlesse, Canterbury. Family home purchased in Fendalton Road, Christchurch. Attends Rangiruru Girls' High School in second term.
Commences nine years study at Canterbury College School of Art, attending part time 1920-21.

1922 Wins Free Scholarship in modelling at Canterbury College School of Art. Full time student.

1923 Wins School of Art Gibbs Landscape Prize, Free Scholarship in Advanced Art. Sydney Thompson returns from France. He interests Olivia in painting people engaged in outdoor activities.

1924 Wins Advanced Day Art Scholarship, Gibbs Prize. During this period Olivia accompanies her mother Rosa, Margaret Stoddart and Cora Wilding on painting excursions near Arthurs Pass and at Woodstock. She joins in student painting excursions to the West Coast.

1925 Wins Advanced Day Art Scholarship, Rosa Sawtell 'Life Painting' Prize, Senior Landscape Prize.

1926 First exhibition with the Canterbury Society of Arts. School of Art Pure Art Scholarship. Holiday in Taranaki.

1927 Wins Pure Art Scholarship, Rosa Sawtell Prize.

1928 Wins Life Painting Prizes.

1929 February. Granted a pass in the Preliminary Examination for the Diploma of Fine Arts. Paints at Rotomanu, West Coast and at Mt Cook.
April 25th. Sails from Wellington bound for England. Arrives June 9th. Stay with cousin in London. Travels to Paris.
July. Joins Maureen Raymond in Concarneau. Visits Sydney Thompson.
August. Returns to London with ill health.
October. Commences study at Slade under Henry Tonks. Italian Art exhibition.Works at Grosvener School of Modern Art.

1930 Travels with Mary Hogg, a Christchurch artist,to Scotland and Ireland. In winter, they hire Dod Proctor's studio in Newlyn, Cornwall. Study with Harold Harvey.

1931 February.Joins Mary Hogg in Capri.
March.Stays ten weeks at Sisters of Saint Clare convent, Assisi. Visits St. Francesco; views Giotto works. Travels to Rome, Florence, London.

1931 November, returns to family farm at Claxby, Swannanoa.

1932 Italian works well received at the Canterbury Society of Arts Annual Exhibition. *La Piccola Marina, Capri* purchased by the Canterbury Society of Arts. Tours the McKenzie country, Central Otago, and Dunedin for two months with English school friend Vivienne Eckford.

1933 October. Exhibits paintings and woodcuts with New Zealand Society of Artists.

1934 Begins West Coast series at Punakaiki. Exhibits with New Zealand Society of Artists.

1936 First Group exhibits. Visits Wellington.

1937 Studies visiting ' Monte Carlo' Russian Ballet Company at rehearsal with Rita Angus. Receives poor reviews in Christchurch.

1938 Article "Olivia Spencer Bower and her Art" published in *Art in New Zealand.* Illustrates Alan Mulgan's book *First With The Sun.*

1939 Father dies aged eighty-seven. Stays at 'Astrolabe' with Perrine Moncrief.

1940 Stays at 'Steepdown', Kaikoura with Fan Blunt.

1942 Paints at Torlesse with Sydney Thompson. Marmaduke marries in December. Rosa and Olivia move to Memorial Avenue in Christchurch.

1943 West Coast painting trip, Punakaiki.
March. Travels to Mahurangi to paint with Sydney Thompson and Airini Vane.
April. Joins Elam School of Arts. Attends classes by Lois White, John Weeks and A.J.C. Fisher. Paints *Alison Pickmere.* Camping at Huia and Piha. Joins Rutland Group.

1944 Hospitalised for several months with suspected rheumatic fever, recurs in 1945. Visits Ruakura.

1946 Paints at Piha while camping. Visits Lake Rotoma in February.

1948 Recuperates at Rawene. Illustrates Dr. G.N. Smith's book, *Later Notes from a Backblocks Hospital.* Paints Maori women and babies at the hospital.

1949 Returns to Christchurch to care for her mother. Paints at Queenstown, Kaikoura and Castle Hill.

1956 Visits North Island, paints at Cape Kidnappers on East Coast. Included in touring exhibition curated by Tomory for Auckland City Art Gallery, 'Five New Zealand Watercolourists'.

1957 Paints Tussock Country at 'Steepdown', Kaikoura.

1960 March. Mother dies aged ninety-five. Three months painting tour of Pacific Islands, including Tahiti, Samoa, Fiji, Taaha, and Bora Bora.

1961 Pacific Island works exhibition. Exhibits oil portrait series of Group members at Group Show.

1963 Travels to Europe. Arrives Naples, paints in Amalfi and Perugia.

1964 Travels through Northern Europe. Views French modern art collections in Russia. Camping in France and Wales.
October-November, stays in Flatford Mill.

1965 Studies at Cass School of Art, London. Stays in Eric Newton's house.
November. Returns to Christchurch via Hawkes Bay.

1967 Paints at the Grampians.

1968 Retrospective exhibition at the Canterbury Society of Arts gallery. Exhibits Spinners.

1969 Moves to Leinster Road home and studio. Plants tussock garden.

1970 Visits Yvonne Rust and paints at Greymouth. Camping at Totaranui, exhibits landscapes in acrylic.

1971 Wins 'Watercolour Section', The National Bank of New Zealand Art Award.

1972 Retrospective exhibition in Christchurch. Exhibits 'Dancers' series.

1974-5 Painting excursions to Southern lakes with Norah Temple.

1975-80 Paints watercolour portraits with local groups.

1976 Works in linoprint with Barry Cleavin.
March. Breaks leg in tramping accident near Punakaiki.

1977 Exhibits lino prints in the last Group Show. Retrospective exhibition at the Robert McDougall Art Gallery; the exhibition tours New Zealand.

1979 Stays with Yvonne Rust in Northland and paints at Cape Reinga.

1980 Awarded The Canterbury Society of Art Medal.

1982 Establishes Olivia Spencer Bower Foundation.
July 8th. Olivia Spencer Bower dies aged seventy-seven.

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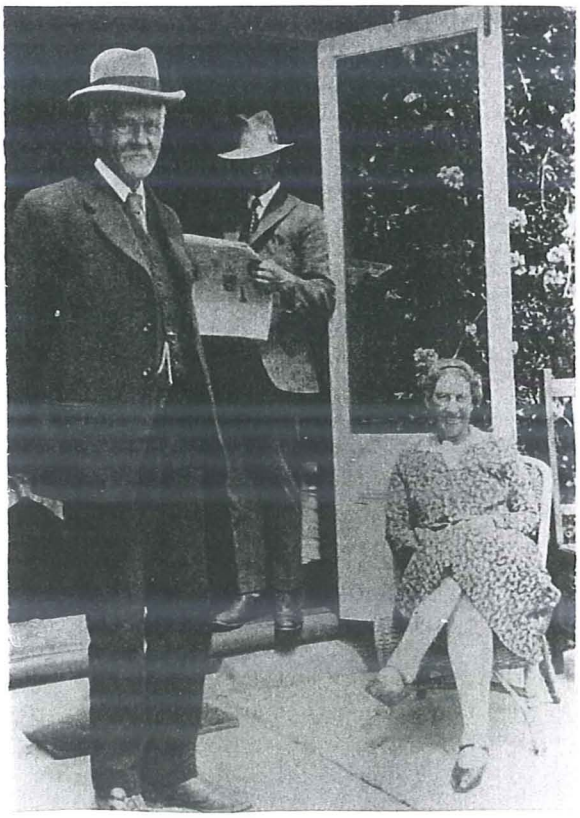
Fig. 1



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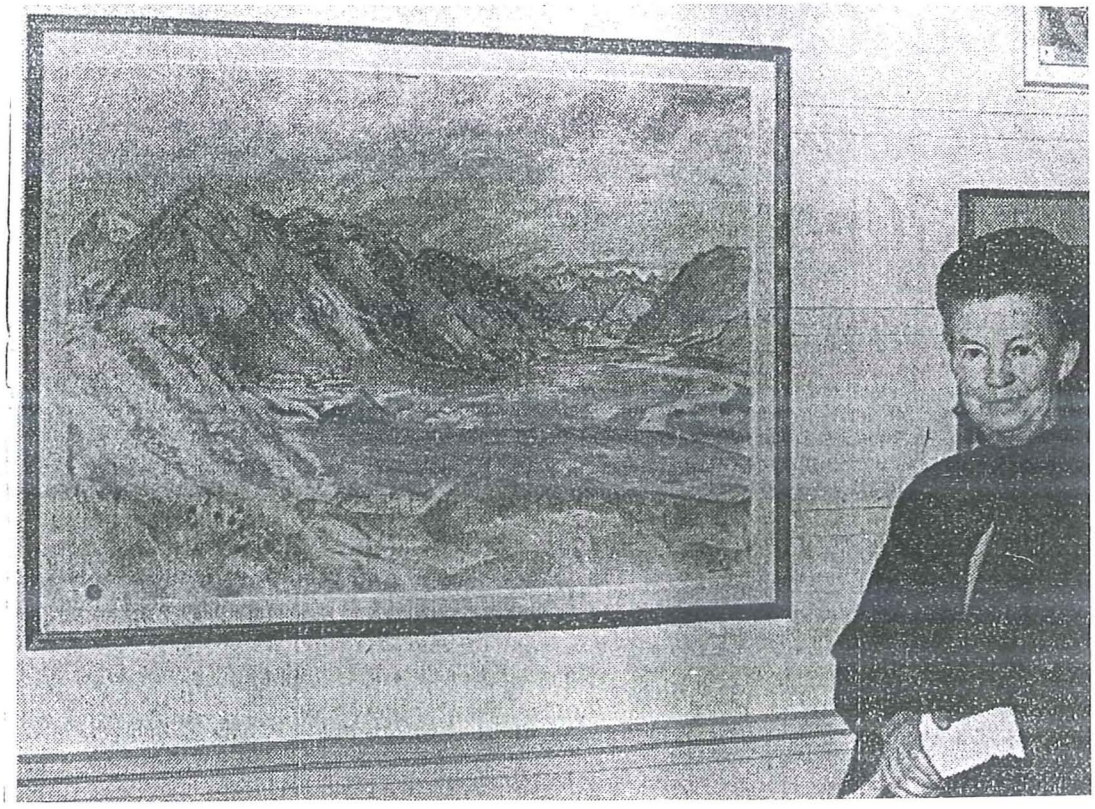

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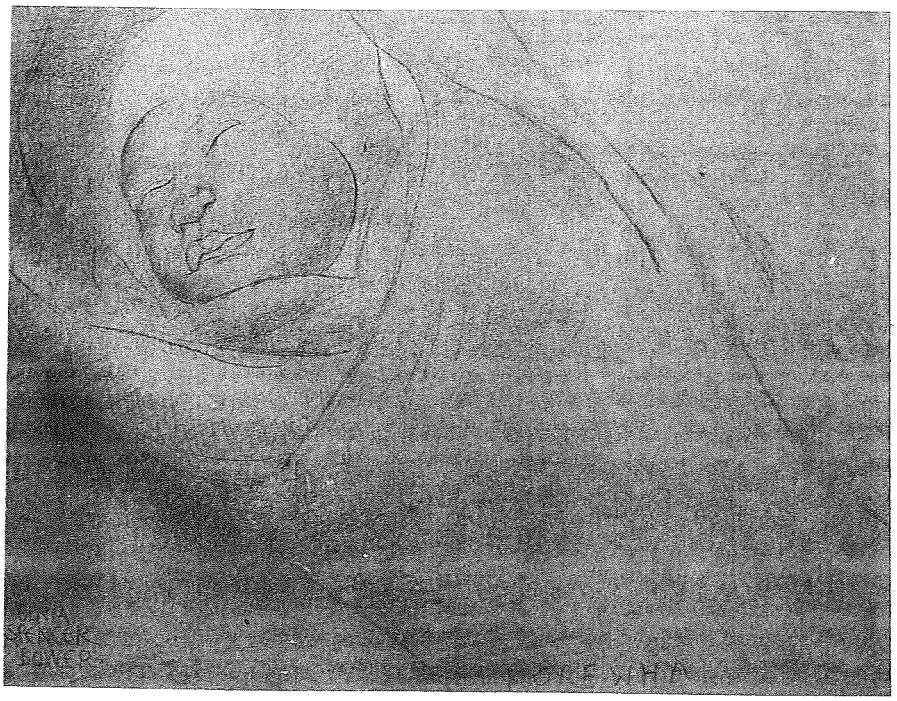

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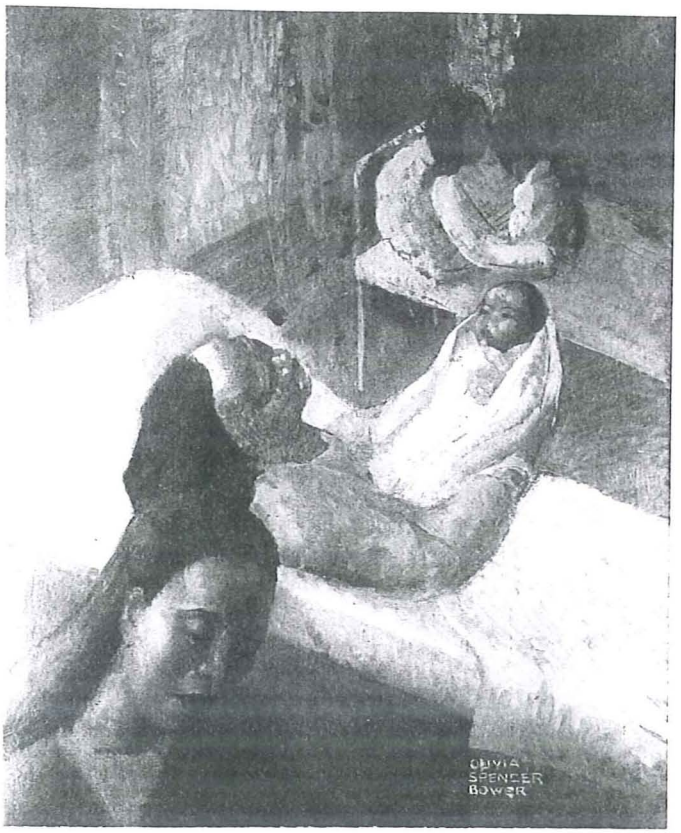

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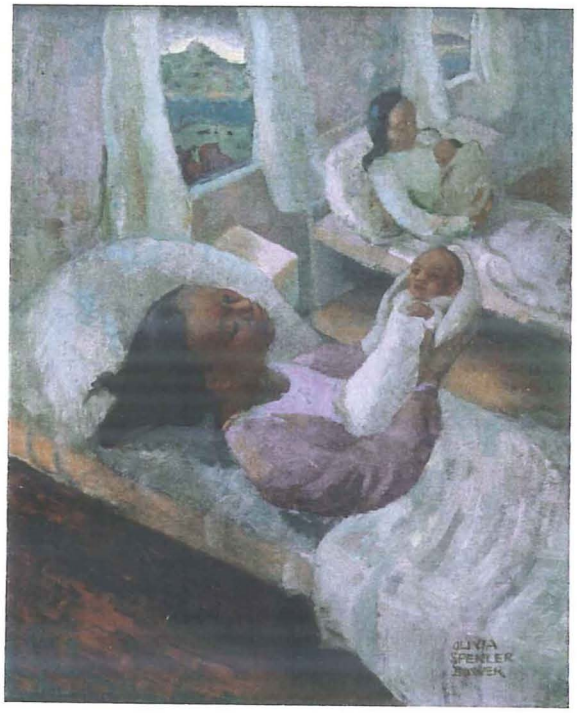

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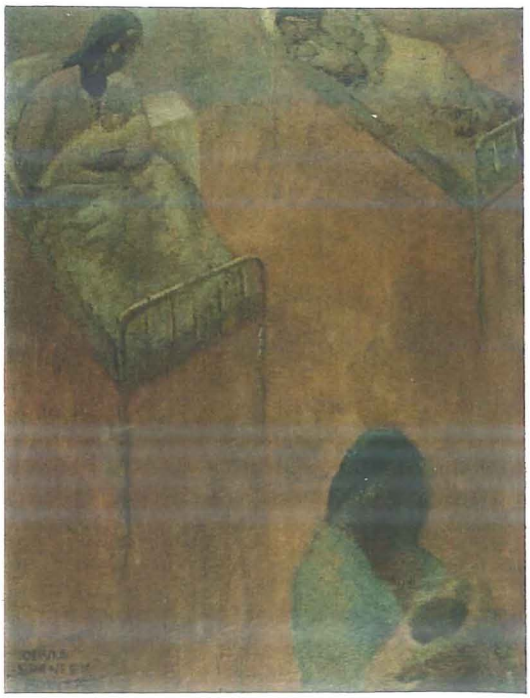

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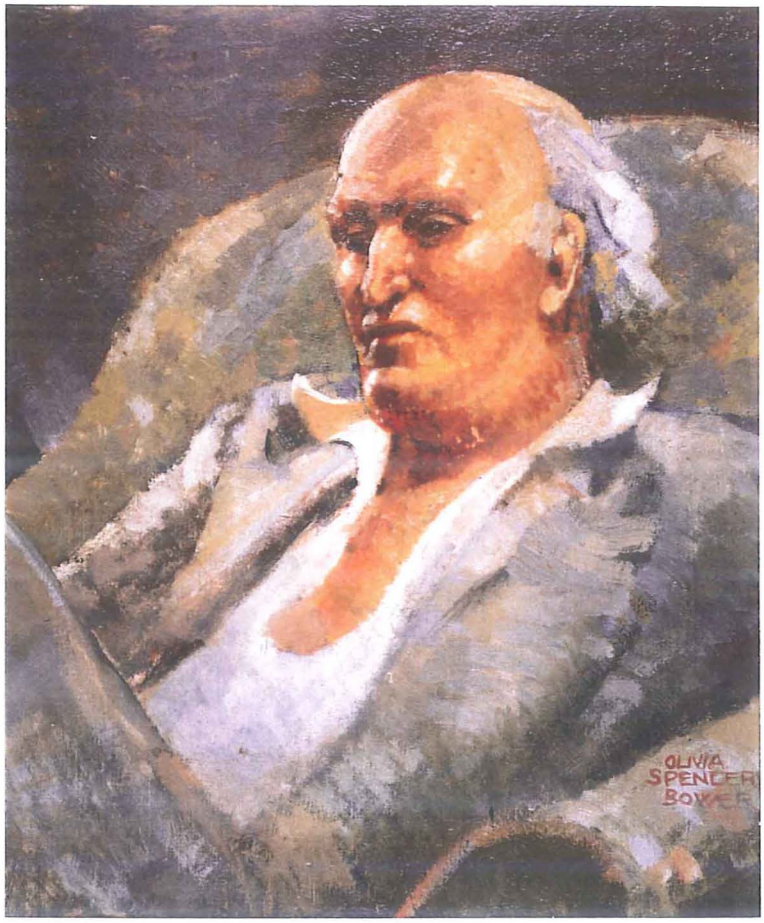

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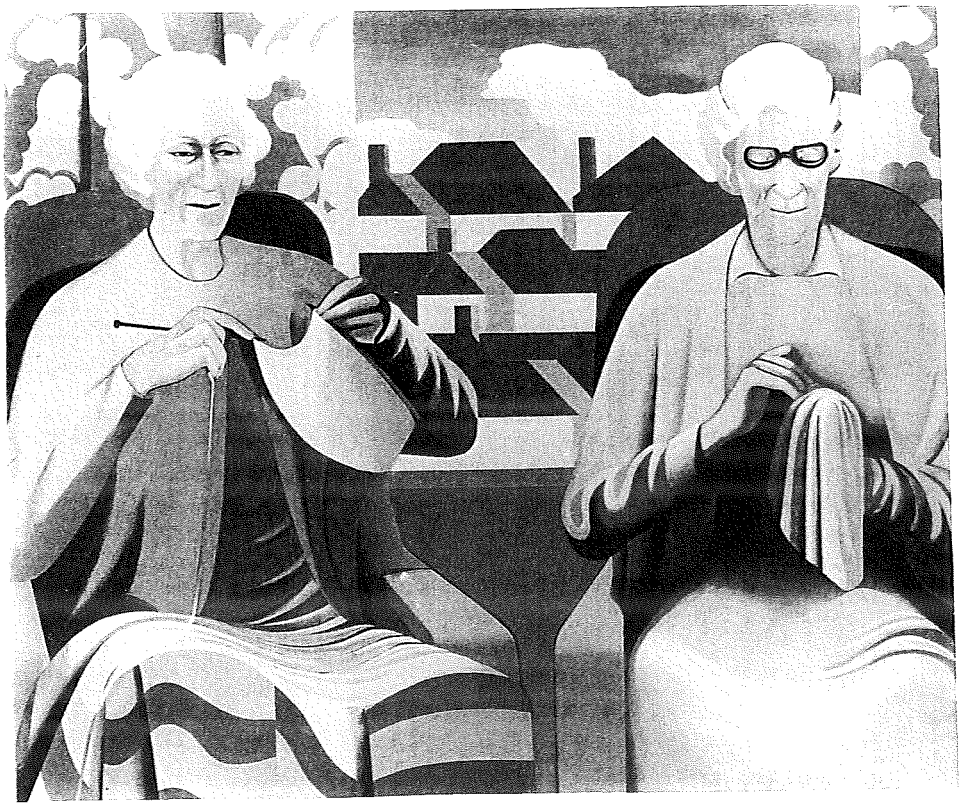

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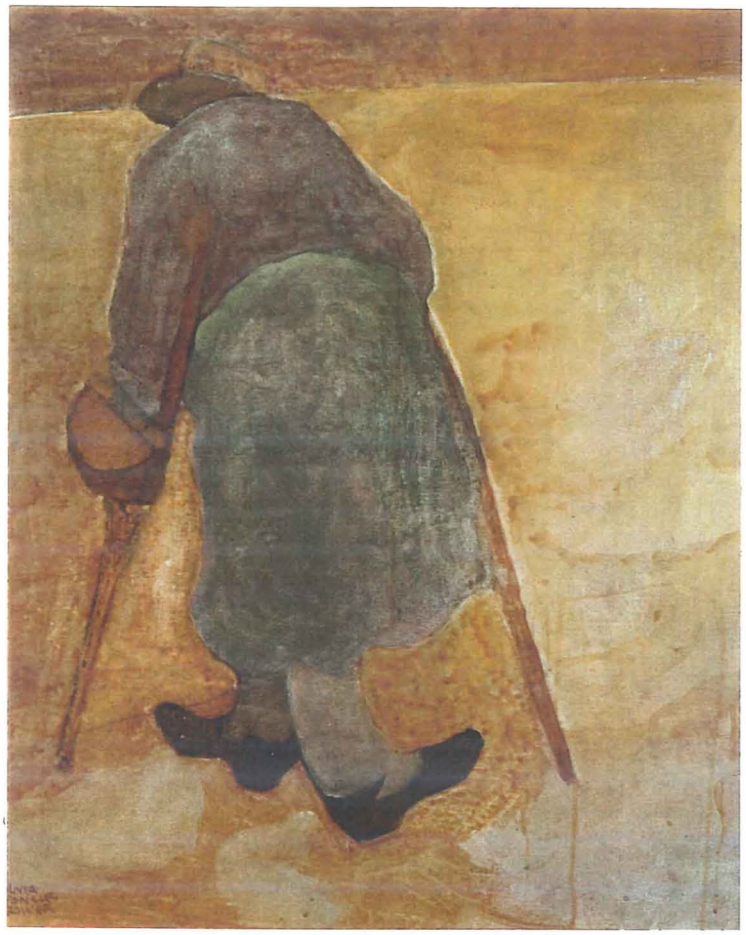

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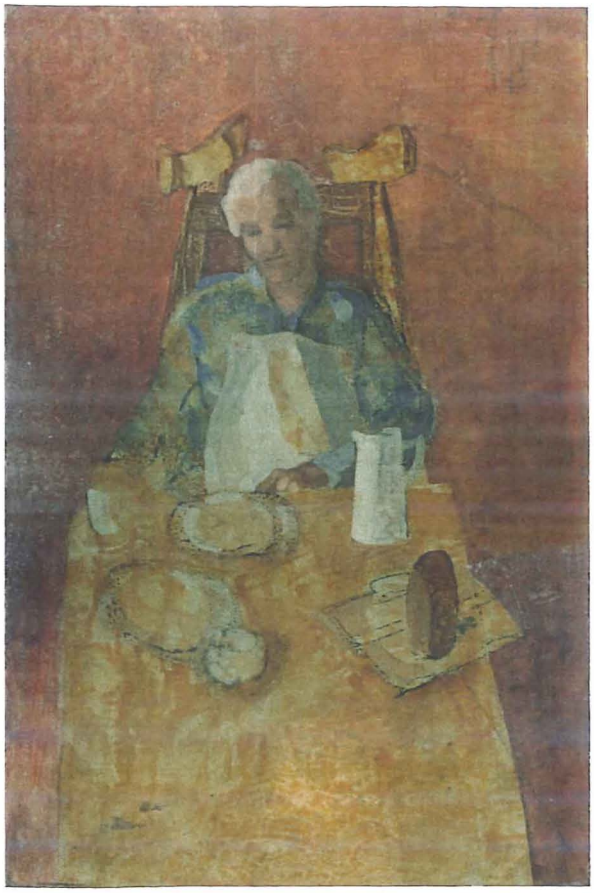

Fig. 35

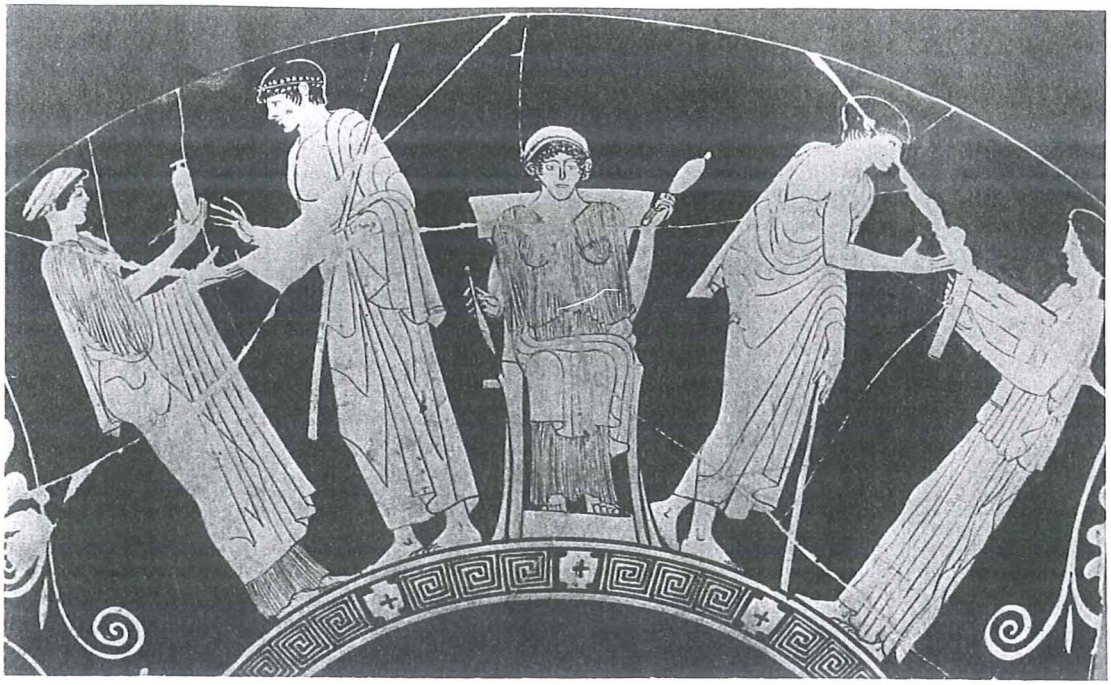

Fig. 36

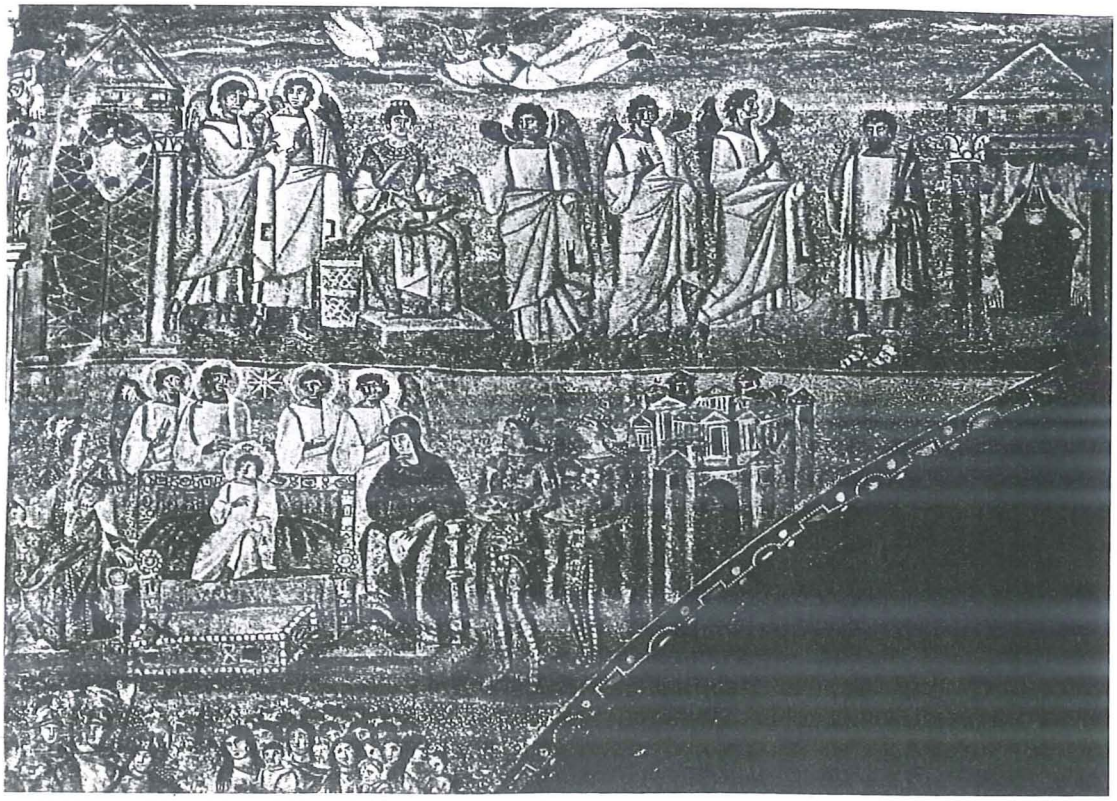

Fig. 37

Fig. 38

Fig. 39

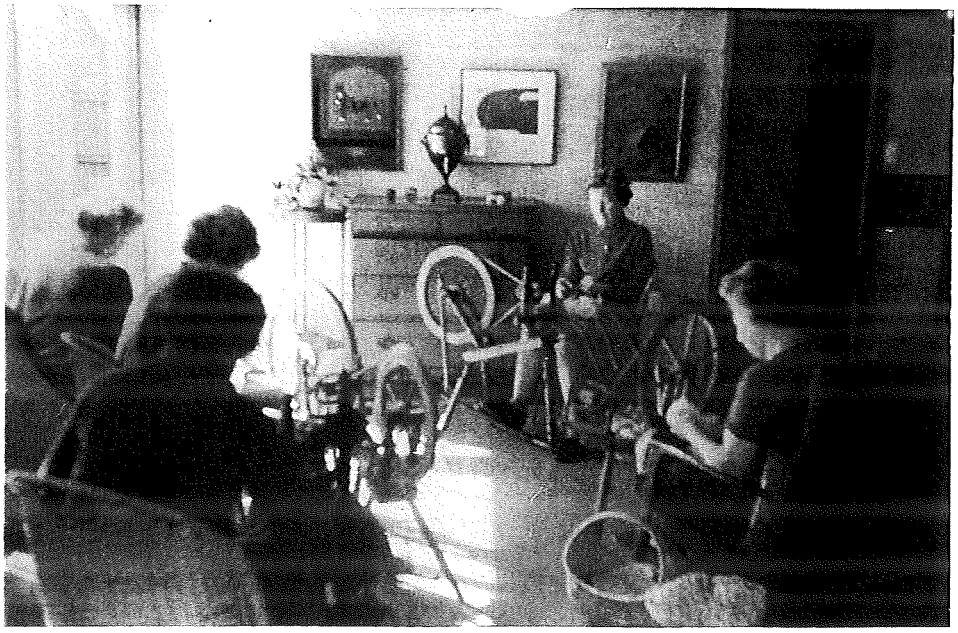

Fig. 40

Fig. 41

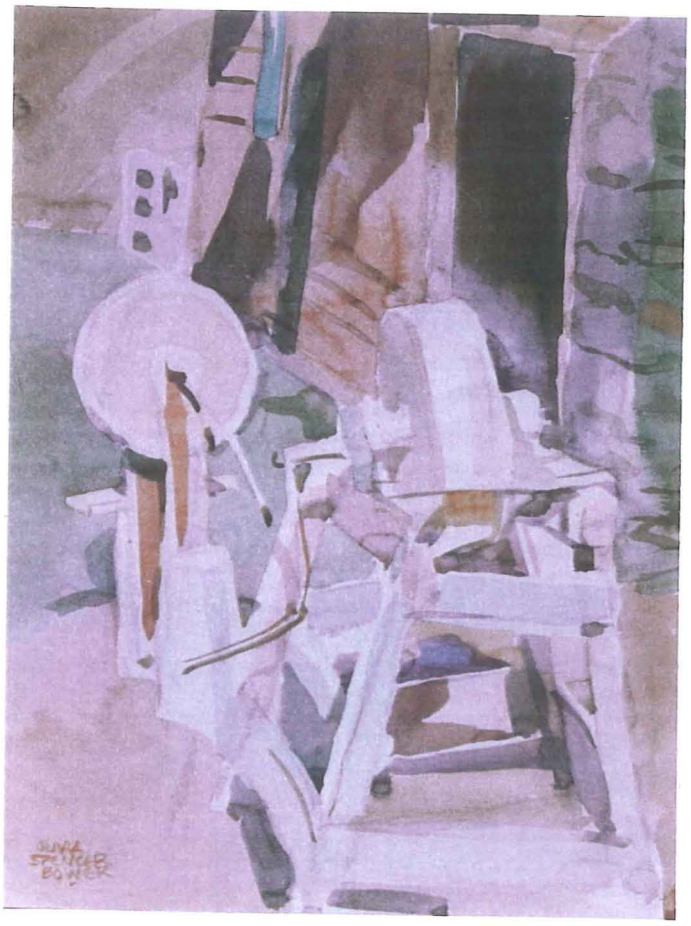

Fig. 42

Fig. 43

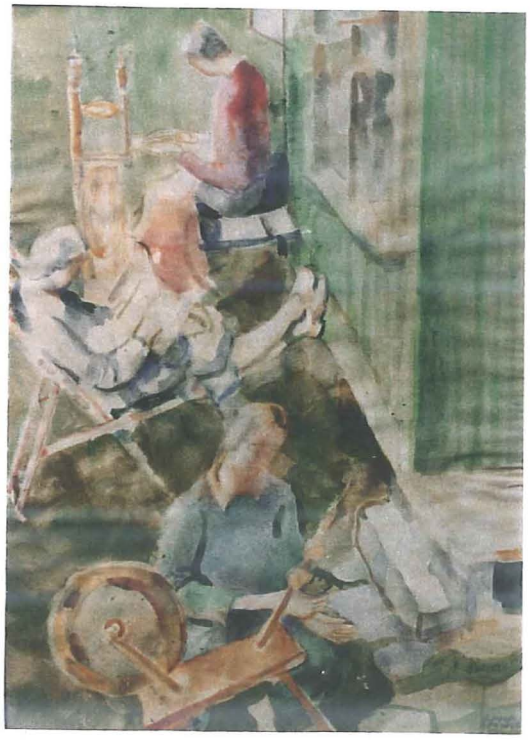

Fig. 44

Fig. 45

Fig. 46

Fig. 47

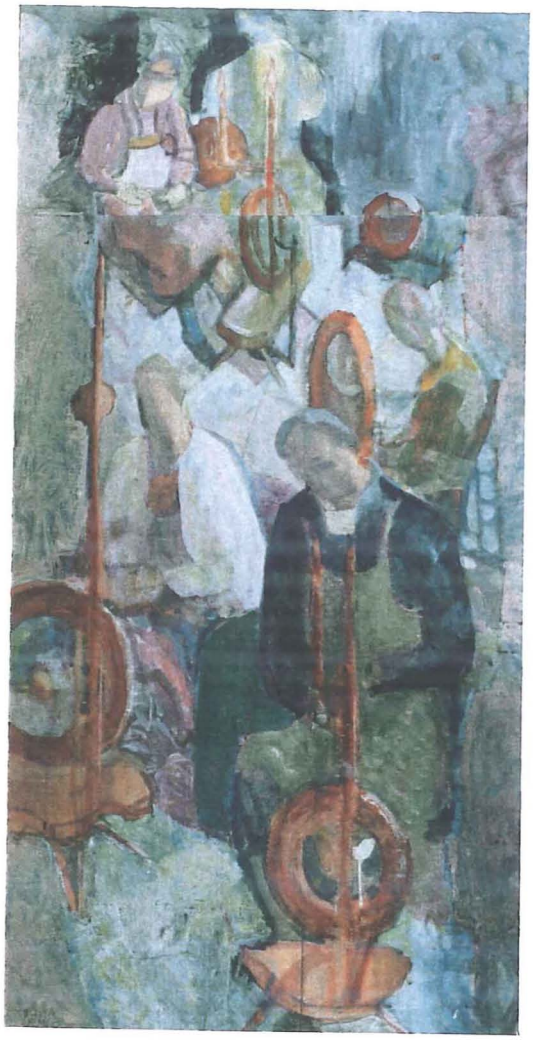

Fig. 48

Fig. 49

Fig. 50

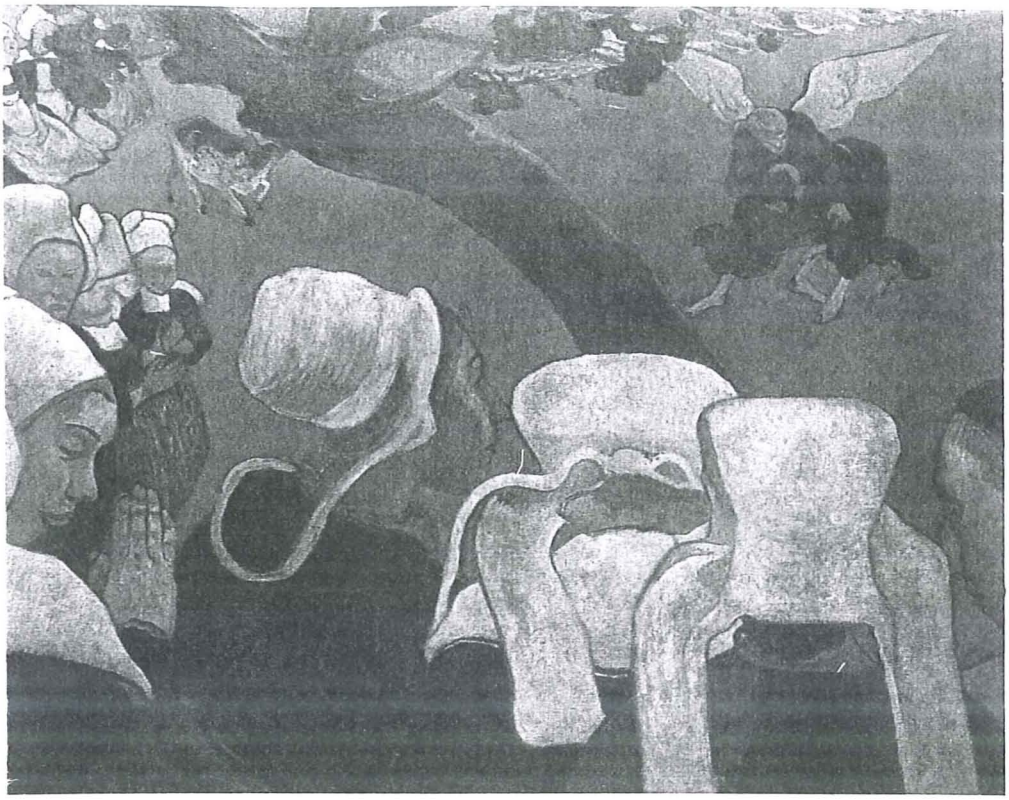

Fig. 51

Fig. 52

Fig. 53

Fig. 54

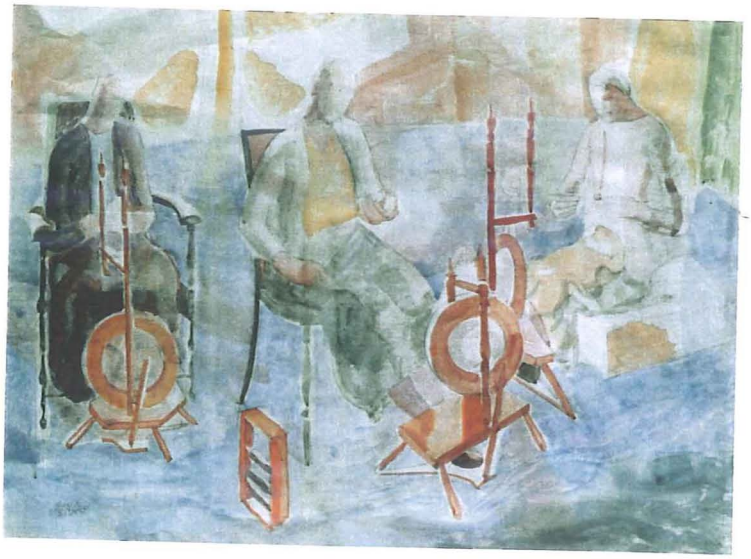

Fig. 55

Fig. 56

Fig. 57

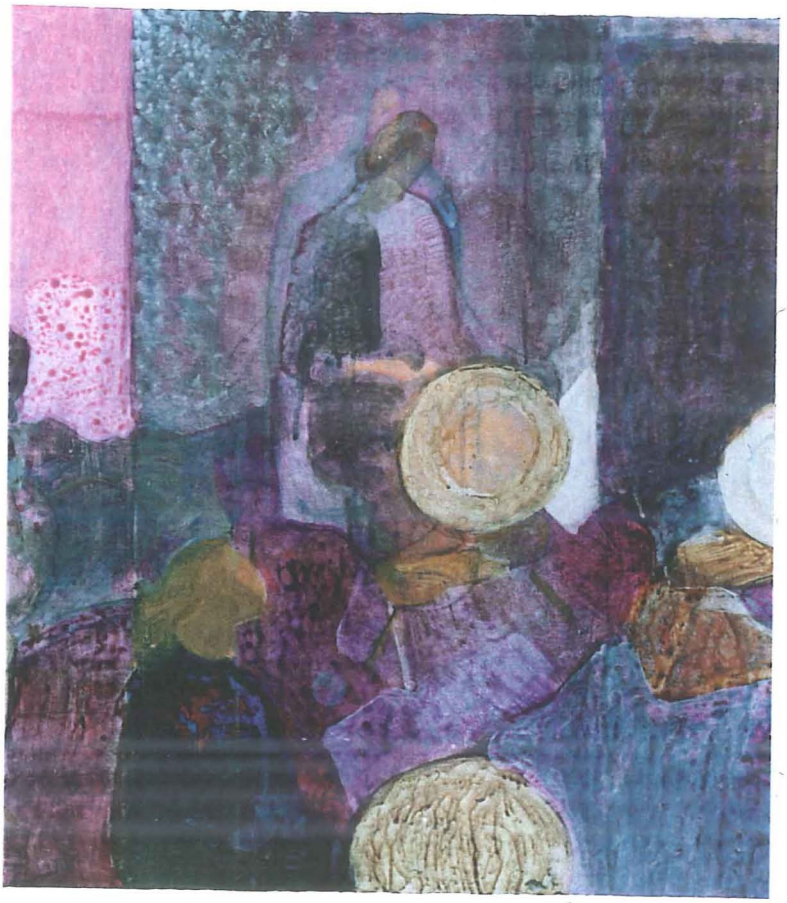

Fig. 58

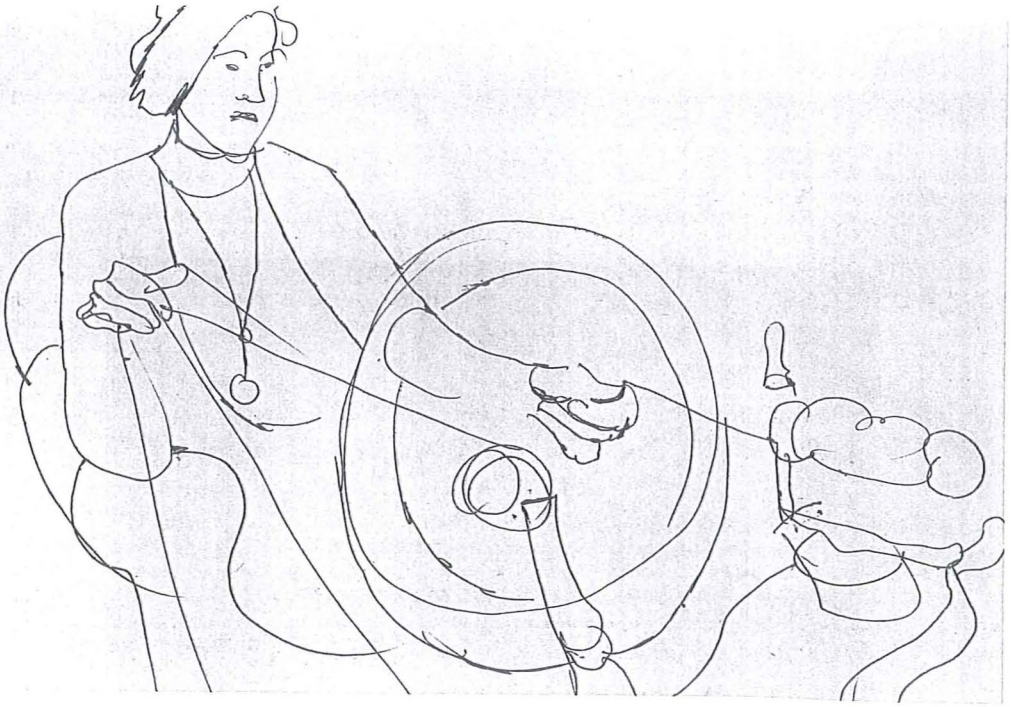

Fig. 59

Fig. 60

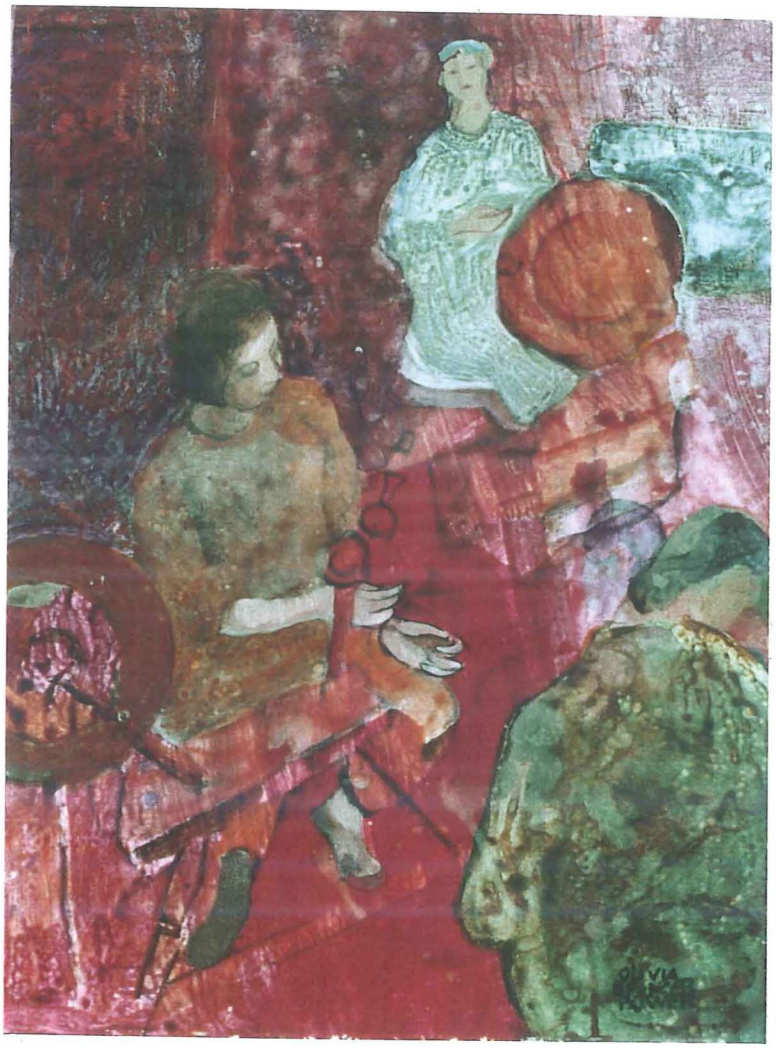

Fig. 61

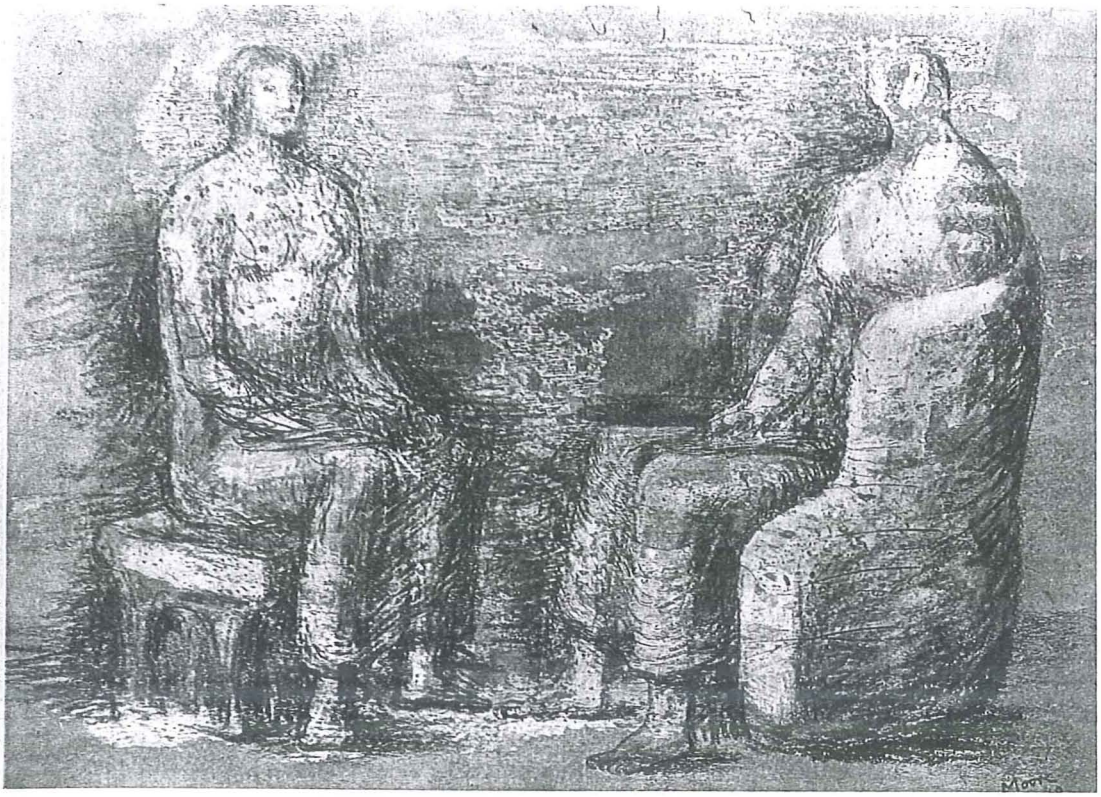

Fig. 62

Fig. 63

Fig. 64

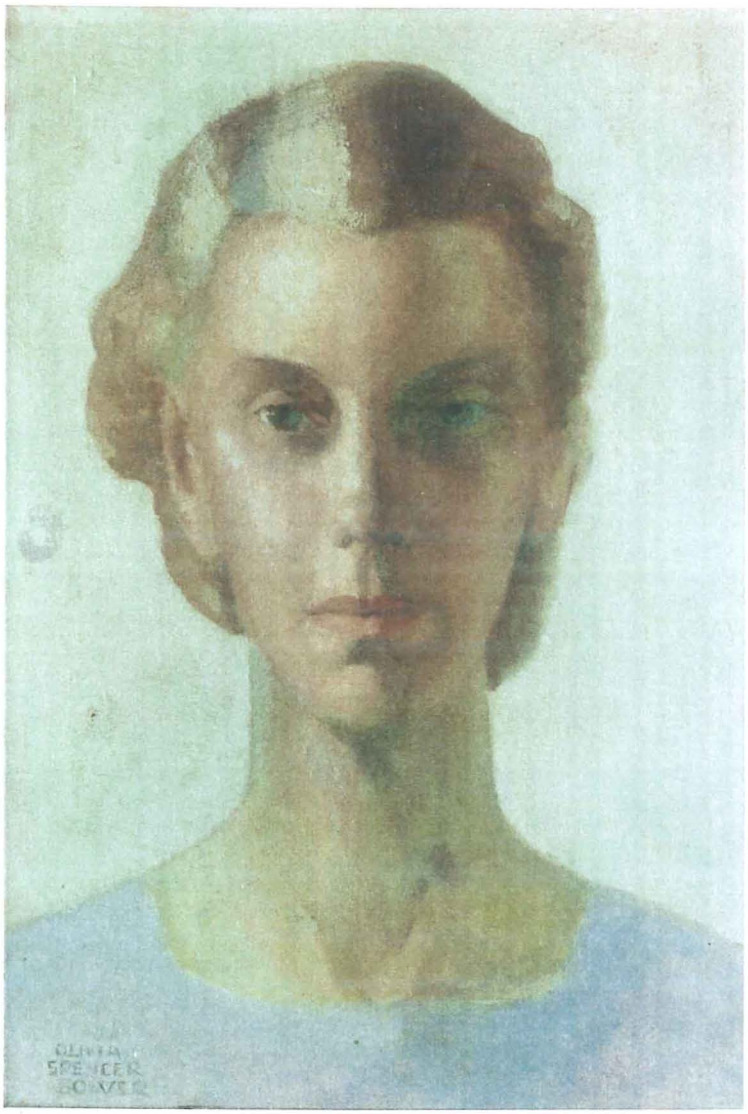

Fig. 65

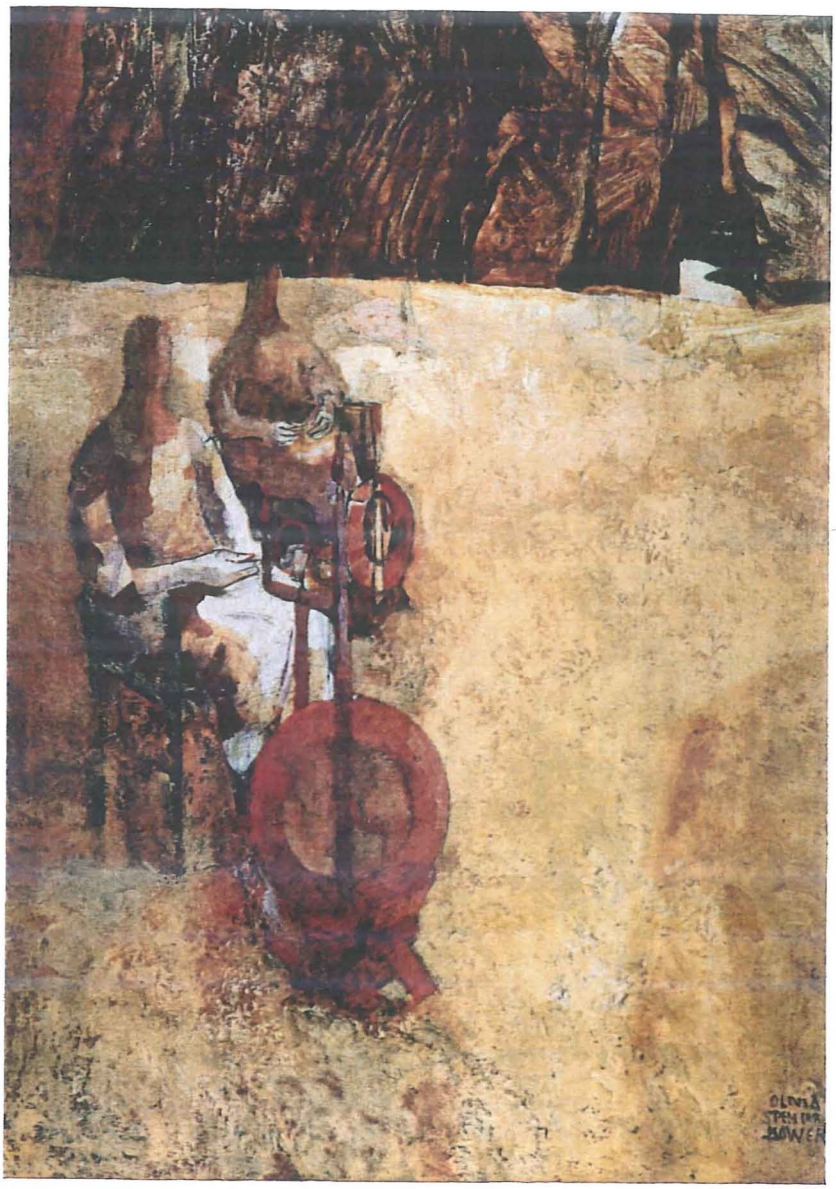

Fig. 66